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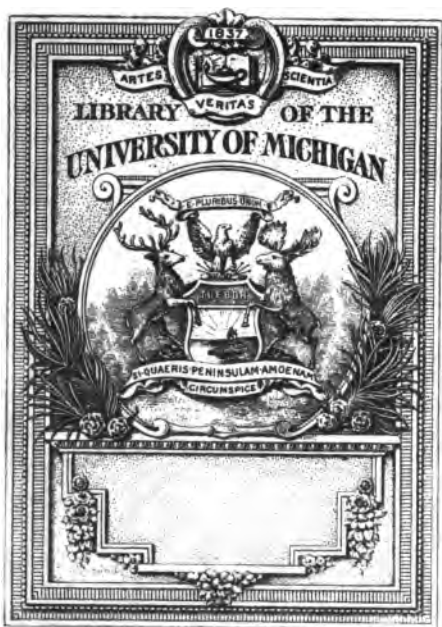
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THE VICAR OF BULLHAMPTON

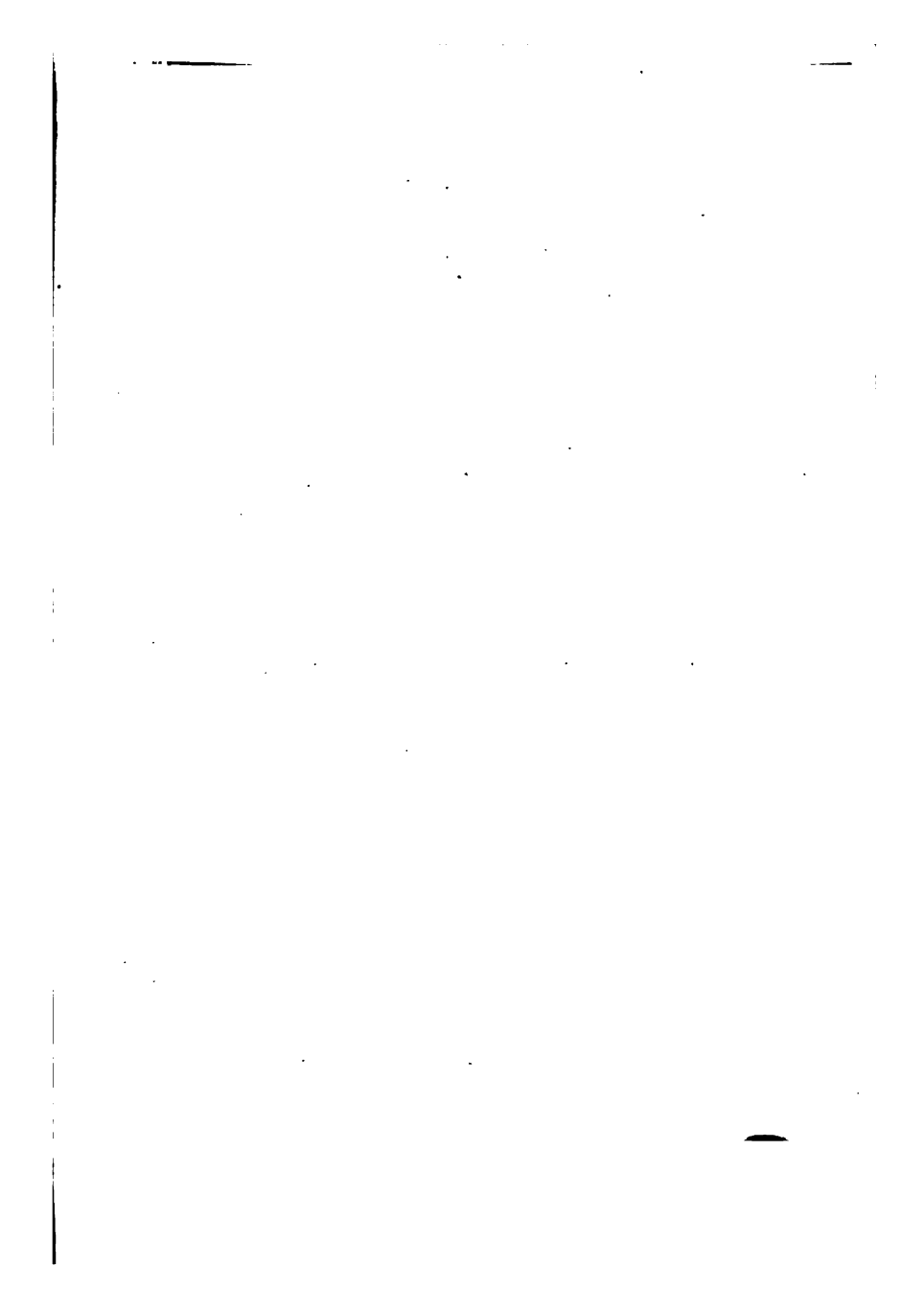
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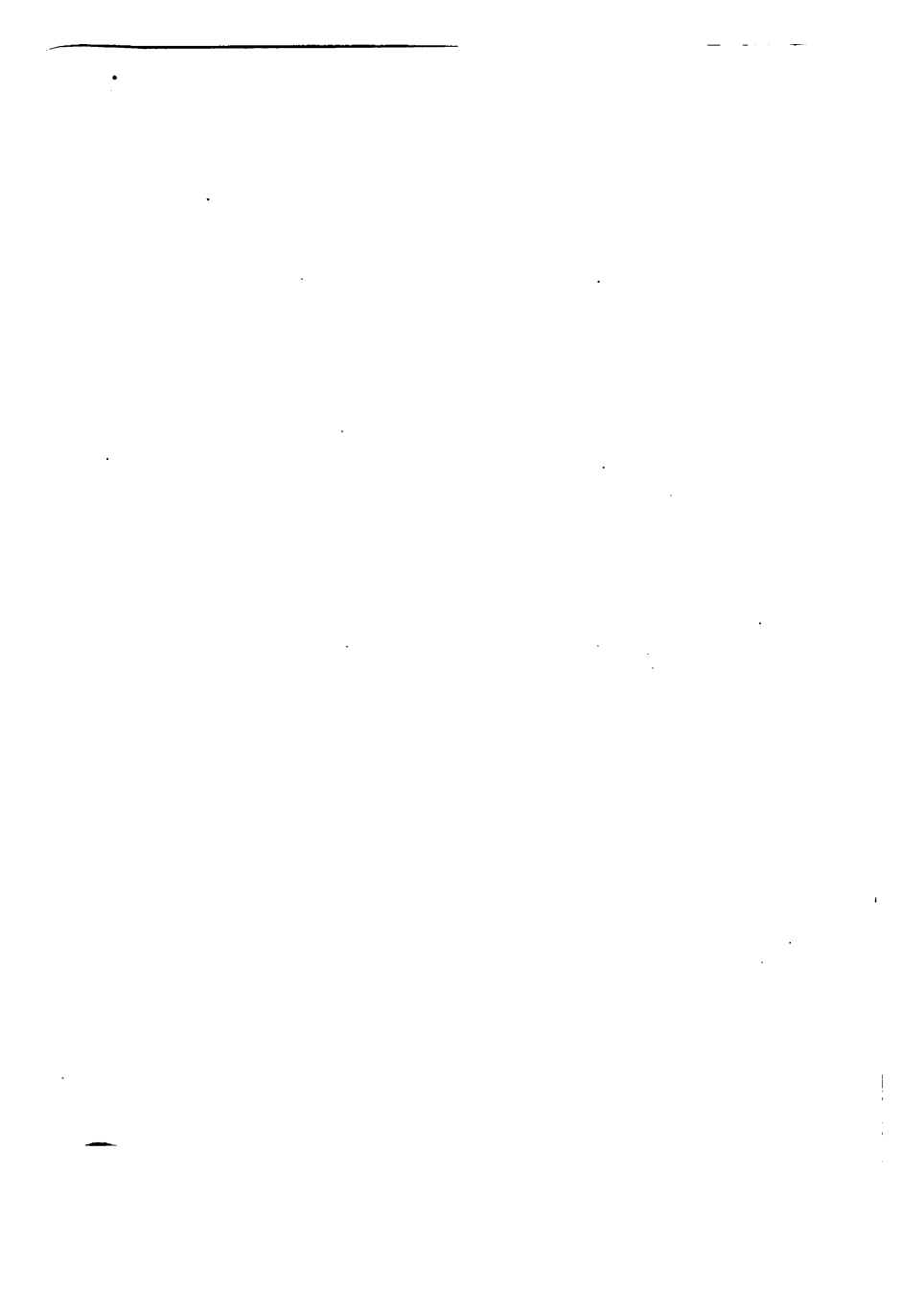
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THE
VICAR OF BULLHAMPTON

BY
ANTHONY TROLLOPE

FRONTISPIECE BY
WALTER H. EVERETT

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS VOL. I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I BULLHAMPTON	1
II FLO'S RED BALL	13
III SAM BRATTLE	22
IV THERE IS NO ONE ELSE	32
V THE MILLER	44
VI BRATTLE'S MILL	51
VII THE MILLER'S WIFE	58
VIII THE LAST DAY	66
IX MISS MARRABLE	79
X CRUNCH'EM CAN'T BE HAD	88
XI DON'T YOU BE AFEARD ABOUT ME	96
XII BONE'M AND HIS MASTER	102
XIII CAPTAIN MARRABLE AND HIS FATHER	111
XIV COUSINHOOD	122
XV THE POLICE AT FAULT	133
XVI MISS LOWTHER ASKS FOR ADVICE	144
XVII THE MARQUIS OF TROWBRIDGE	156
XVIII BLANK PAPER	172
XIX SAM BRATTLE RETURNS HOME	179
XX I HAVE A JUPITER OF MY OWN NOW	189
XXI WHAT PARSON JOHN THINKS ABOUT IT	201
XXII WHAT THE FENWICKS THOUGHT ABOUT IT	209

v

206700

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII WHAT MR. GILMORE THOUGHT ABOUT IT	216
XXIV THE REV. HENRY FITZACKERLEY CHAMBER- LAINE	223
XXV CARRY BRATTLE	233
XXVI THE TURNOVER CORRESPONDENCE	244
XXVII I NEVER SHAMED NONE OF THEM	255
XXVIII MRS. BRATTLE'S JOURNEY	266
XXIX THE BULL AT LORING	273
XXX THE AUNT AND THE UNCLE	287
XXXI MARY LOWTHER FEELS HER WAY	295
XXXII MR. GILMORE'S SUCCESS	301
XXXIII FAREWELL	309
XXXIV BULLHAMPTON NEWS	323
XXXV MR. PUDDLEHAM'S NEW CHAPEL	331
XXXVI SAM BRATTLE GOES OFF AGAIN	342
XXXVII FEMALE MARTYRDOM	353

The Vicar of Bullhampton

CHAPTER I

BULLHAMPTON

I AM disposed to believe that no novel reader in England has seen the little town of Bullhampton, in Wiltshire, except such novel readers as live there, and those others, very few in number, who visit it perhaps four times a year for the purposes of trade, and who are known as commercial gentlemen. Bullhampton is seventeen miles from Salisbury, eleven from Marlborough, nine from Westbury, seven from Haylesbury, and five from the nearest railroad station, which is called Bullhampton Road, and lies on the line from Salisbury to Yeovil. It is not quite on Salisbury Plain, but probably was so once, when Salisbury Plain was wider than it is now. Whether it should be called a small town or a large village I cannot say. It has no mayor, and no market, but it has a fair. There rages a feud in Bullhampton touching this want of a market, as there are certain Bullhamptonites who aver that the charter giving all rights of a market to Bullhampton does exist; and that at one period in its history the market existed also,—for a year or two; but the three bakers and two butchers are opposed to change; and the patriots of the place, though they declaim on the matter over their evening pipes and gin-and-water, have not enough of matutinal zeal to carry out their purpose. Bullhamp-

ton is situated on a little river, which meanders through the chalky ground, and has a quiet, slow, dreamy prettiness of its own. A mile above the town,—for we will call it a town,—the stream divides itself into many streamlets, and there is a district called the Water Meads, in which bridges are more frequent than trustworthy, in which there are hundreds of little sluice-gates for regulating the irrigation, and a growth of grass which is a source of much anxiety and considerable trouble to the farmers. There is a water-mill here, too, very low, with ever a floury, mealy look, with a pasty look often, as the flour becomes damp with the spray of the water as it is thrown by the mill-wheel. It seems to be a tattered, shattered, ramshackle concern, but it has been in the same family for many years; and as the family has not hitherto been in distress, it may be supposed that the mill still affords a fair means of livelihood. The Brattles,—for Jacob Brattle is the miller's name,—have ever been known as men who paid their way, and were able to hold up their heads. But nevertheless Jacob Brattle is ever at war with his landlord in regard to repairs wanted for his mill, and Mr. Gilmore, the landlord in question, declares that he wishes that the Avon would some night run so high as to carry off the mill altogether. Bullhampton is very quiet. There is no special trade in the place. Its interests are altogether agricultural. It has no newspaper. Its tendencies are altogether conservative. It is a good deal given to religion; and the Primitive Methodists have a very strong holding there, although in all Wiltshire there is not a clergyman more popular in his own parish than the Rev. Frank Fenwick. He himself, in his inner heart, rather likes his rival, Mr. Puddleham, the dissenting minister; because Mr. Pud-

dleham is an earnest man, who, in spite of the intensity of his ignorance, is efficacious among the poor. But Mr. Fenwick is bound to keep up the fight; and Mr. Puddleham considers it to be his duty to put down Mr. Fenwick and the Church Establishment altogether.

The men of Bullhampton, and the women also, are aware that the glory has departed from them, in that Bullhampton was once a borough, and returned two members to Parliament. No borough more close, or shall we say more rotten, ever existed. It was not that the Marquis of Trowbridge had, what has often delicately been called, an interest in it; but he held it absolutely in his breeches pocket, to do with it as he liked; and it had been the liking of the late Marquis to sell one of the seats at every election to the highest bidder on his side in politics. Nevertheless, the people of Bullhampton had gloried in being a borough, and the shame, or at least the regret of their downfall, had not yet altogether passed away when the tidings of a new Reform Bill came upon them. The people of Bullhampton are notoriously slow to learn, and slow to forget. It was told of a farmer of Bullhampton, in old days, that he asked what had become of Charles I., when told that Charles II. had been restored. Cromwell had come and gone, and had not disturbed him at Bullhampton.

At Bullhampton there is no public building, except the church, which indeed is a very handsome edifice with a magnificent tower, a thing to go to see, and almost as worthy of a visit as its neighbour the cathedral at Salisbury. The body of the church is somewhat low, but its yellow-grey colour is perfect, and there is, moreover, a Norman door, and there are Early English

windows in the aisle, and a perfection of perpendicular architecture in the chancel, all of which should bring many visitors to Bullhampton; and there are brasses in the nave, very curious, and one or two tombs of the Gilmore family, very rare in their construction, and the churchyard is large and green, and bowery, with the Avon flowing close under it, and nooks in it which would make a man wish to die that he might be buried there. The church and churchyard of Bullhampton are indeed perfect, and yet but few people go to see it. It has not as yet had its own bard to sing its praises. Properly it is called Bullhampton Monachorum, the living having belonged to the friars of Chiltern. The great tithes now go to the Earl of Todmorden, who has no other interest in the place whatever, and who never saw it. The benefice belongs to St. John's, Oxford, and as the vicarage is not worth more than £400 a year, it happens that a clergyman generally accepts it before he has lived for twenty or thirty years in the common room of his college. Mr. Fenwick took it on his marriage, when he was about twenty-seven, and Bullhampton has been lucky.

The bulk of the parish belongs to the Marquis of Trowbridge, who, however, has no residence within ten miles of it. The squire of the parish is Squire Gilmore,—Harry Gilmore,—and he possesses every acre in it that is not owned by the Marquis. With the village, or town as it may be, Mr. Gilmore has no concern; but he owns a large tract of the water meads, and again has a farm or two up on the downs as you go towards Chiltern. But they lie out of the parish of Bullhampton. Altogether he is a man of about fifteen hundred a year, and as he is not as yet married, many a Wiltshire mother's eye is turned towards Hampton

Privets, as Mr. Gilmore's house is, somewhat fantastically, named.

Mr. Gilmore's character must be made to develop itself in these pages,—if such developing may be accomplished. He is to be our hero,—or at least one of two. The author will not, in these early words, declare that the squire will be his favourite hero, as he will wish that his readers should form their own opinions on that matter. At this period he was a man somewhat over thirty,—perhaps thirty-three years of age, who had done fairly well at Harrow and at Oxford, but had never done enough to make his friends regard him as a swan. He still read a good deal; but he shot and fished more than he read, and had become, since his residence at the Privets, very fond of the outside of his books. Nevertheless, he went on buying books, and was rather proud of his library. He had travelled a good deal, and was a politician,—somewhat scandalising his own tenants and other Bullhamptonites by voting for the liberal candidates for his division of the county. The Marquis of Trowbridge did not know him, but regarded him as an objectionable person, who did not understand the nature of the duties which devolved upon him as a country gentleman; and the Marquis himself was always spoken of by Mr. Gilmore as—an idiot. On these various grounds the squire has hitherto regarded himself as being a little in advance of other squires, and has, perhaps, given himself more credit than he has deserved for intellectuality. But he is a man with a good heart, and a pure mind, generous, desirous of being just, somewhat sparing of that which is his own, never desirous of that which is another's. He is good-looking, though, perhaps, somewhat ordinary in ap-

pearance; tall, strong, with dark-brown hair, and dark-brown whiskers, with small, quick grey eyes, and teeth which are almost too white and too perfect for a man. Perhaps it is his greatest fault that he thinks that as a liberal politician and as an English country gentleman he has combined in his own position all that is most desirable upon earth. To have the acres without the acre-laden brains, is, he thinks, everything.

And now it may be as well told at once that Mr. Gilmore is over head and ears in love with a young lady to whom he has offered his hand and all that can be made to appertain to the future mistress of Hampton Privets. And the lady is one who has nothing to give in return but her hand, and her heart, and herself. The neighbours all around the country have been saying for the last five years that Harry Gilmore was looking out for an heiress; for it has always been told of Harry, especially among those who have opposed him in politics, that he had a keen eye for the main chance. But Mary Lowther has not, and never can have, a penny with which to make up for any deficiency in her own personal attributes. But Mary is a lady, and Harry Gilmore thinks her the sweetest woman on whom his eye ever rested. Whatever resolutions as to fortune-hunting he may have made,—though probably none were ever made,—they have all now gone to the winds. He is so absolutely in love that nothing in the world is, to him, at present worth thinking about except Mary Lowther. I do not doubt that he would vote for a conservative candidate if Mary Lowther so ordered him; or consent to go and live in New York if Mary Lowther would accept him on no other condition. All Bullhampton parish is nothing to him at the present moment, except as far as it is connected with Mary

Lowther. Hampton Privets is dear to him only as far as it can be made to look attractive in the eyes of Mary Lowther. The mill is to be repaired, though he knows he will never get any interest on the outlay, because Mary Lowther has said that Bullhampton watermeads would be destroyed if the mill were to tumble down. He has drawn for himself mental pictures of Mary Lowther till he has invested her with every charm and grace and virtue that can adorn a woman. In very truth he believes her to be perfect. He is actually and absolutely in love. Mary Lowther has hitherto neither accepted nor rejected him. In a very few lines further on we will tell how the matter stands between them.

It has already been told that the Rev. Frank Fenwick is Vicar of Bullhampton. Perhaps he was somewhat guided in his taking of the living by the fact that Harry Gilmore, the squire of the parish, had been his very intimate friend at Oxford. Fenwick, at the period with which we are about to begin our story, had been six years at Bullhampton, and had been married about five and a half. Of him something has already been said, and perhaps it may be only necessary further to state that he is a tall, fair-haired man, already becoming somewhat bald on the top of his head, with bright eyes, and the slightest possible amount of whiskers, and a look about his nose and mouth which seems to imply that he could be severe if he were not so thoroughly good-humoured. He has more of breeding in his appearance than his friend,—a show of higher blood; though whence comes such show, and how one discerns that appearance, few of us can tell. He was a man who read more and thought more than Harry Gilmore, though given much to athletics and very fond

of field sports. It shall only further be said of Frank Fenwick that he esteemed both his churchwardens and his bishop, and was afraid of neither.

His wife had been a Miss Balfour, from Loring, in Gloucestershire, and had had some considerable fortune. She was now the mother of four children, and, as Fenwick used to say, might have fourteen for anything he knew. But as he also had possessed some small means of his own, there was no poverty, or prospect of poverty at the vicarage, and the babies were made welcome as they came. Mrs. Fenwick is as good a specimen of an English country parson's wife as you shall meet in a county,—gay, good-looking, fond of the society around her, with a little dash of fun, knowing in blankets and corduroys and coals and tea; knowing also as to beer and gin and tobacco; acquainted with every man and woman in the parish; thinking her husband to be quite as good as the squire in regard to position, and to be infinitely superior to the squire, or any other man in the world, in regard to his personal self;—a handsome, pleasant, well-dressed lady, who has no nonsense about her. Such a one was, and is, Mrs. Fenwick.

Now the Balfours were considerable people at Loring, though their property was not county property; and it was always considered that Janet Balfour might have done better than she did, in a worldly point of view. Of that, however, little had been said at Loring, because it soon became known there that she and her husband stood rather well in the country round about Bullhampton; and when she asked Mary Lowther to come and stay with her for six months, Mary Lowther's aunt, Miss Marrable, had nothing to say against the arrangement, although she herself was a most particular

old lady, and always remembered that Mary Lowther was third or fourth cousin to some earl in Scotland. Nothing more shall be said of Miss Marrable at present, as it is expedient, for the sake of the story, that the reader should fix his attention on Bullhampton till he find himself quite at home there. I would wish him to know his way among the water meads, to be quite alive to the fact that the lodge of Hampton Privets is a mile and a quarter to the north of Bullhampton church, and half a mile across the fields west from Brattle's mill; that Mr. Fenwick's parsonage adjoins the churchyard, being thus a little farther from Hampton Privets than the church, and that there commences Bullhampton street, with its inn,—the Trowbridge Arms, its four public-houses, its three bakers, and its two butchers. The bounds of the parsonage run down to the river, so that the Vicar can catch his trout from his own bank,—though he much prefers to catch them at distances which admit of the appurtenances of sport.

Now there must be one word of Mary Lowther, and then the story shall be commenced. She had come to the vicarage in May, intending to stay a month, and it was now August, and she had been already three months with her friend. Everybody said that she was staying because she intended to become the mistress of Hampton Privets. It was a month since Harry Gilmore had formally made his offer, and as she had not refused him, and as she still stayed on, the folk of Bullhampton were justified in their conclusions. She was a tall girl, with dark brown hair, which she wore fastened in a knot at the back of her head, after the simplest fashion. Her eyes were large and grey, and full of lustre; but they were not eyes which

would make you say that Mary Lowther was especially a bright-eyed girl. They were eyes, however, which could make you think, when they looked at you, that if Mary Lowther would only like you, how happy your lot would be,—that if she would love you, the world would have nothing higher or better to offer. If you judged her face by any rules of beauty, you would say that it was too thin; but feeling its influence with sympathy, you could never wish it to be changed. Her nose and mouth were perfect. How many little noses there are on young women's faces which of themselves cannot be said to be things of beauty, or joys for ever, although they do very well in their places! There is the softness and colour of youth, and perhaps a dash of fun, and the eyes above are bright, and the lips below alluring. In the midst of such sweet charms, what does it matter that the nose be puggish,—or even a nose of putty, such as you think you might improve in the original material by a squeeze of your thumb and forefinger? But with Mary Lowther her nose itself was a feature of exquisite beauty, a feature that could be eloquent with pity, reverence, or scorn. The curves of the nostrils, with their almost transparent membranes, told of the working of the mind within, as every portion of human face should tell—in some degree. And the mouth was equally expressive, though the lips were thin. It was a mouth to watch, and listen to, and read with curious interest, rather than a mouth to kiss. Not but that the desire to kiss would come, when there might be a hope to kiss with favour;—but they were lips which no man would think to ravage in boisterous play. It might have been said that there was a want of capability for passion in her face, had it not been for the well-marked dimple in her little chin,—that

soft couch in which one may be always sure, when one sees it, that some little imp of Love lies hidden.

It has already been said that Mary Lowther was tall,—taller than common. Her back was as lovely a form of womanhood as man's eye ever measured and appreciated. Her movements, which were never naturally quick, had a grace about them which touched men and women alike. It was the very poetry of motion; but its chief beauty consisted in this, that it was what it was by no effort of her own. We have all seen those efforts, and it may be that many of us have liked them when they have been made on our own behalf. But no man as yet could ever have felt himself to be so far flattered by Miss Lowther. Her dress was very plain; as it became her that it should be, for she was living on the kindness of an aunt who was herself not a rich woman. But it may be doubted whether dress could have added much to her charms.

She was now turned one-and-twenty, and though, doubtless, there were young men at Loring who had sighed for her smiles, no young man had sighed with any efficacy. It must be acknowledged, indeed, that she was not a girl for whom the most susceptible of young men would sigh. Young men given to sigh are generally attracted by some outward and visible sign of softness which may be taken as an indication that sighing will produce some result, however small. At Loring it was said that Mary Lowther was cold and repellent, and, on that account, one who might very probably descend to the shades as an old maid in spite of the beauty of which she was the acknowledged possessor. No enemy, no friend, had ever accused her of being a flirt.

Such as she was, Harry Gilmore's passion for her

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much astonished his friends. Those who knew him best had thought that, as regarded his fate matrimonial,—or nonmatrimonial,—there were three chances before him: he might carry out their presumed intention of marrying money; or he might become the sudden spoil of the bow and spear of some red-cheeked lass; or he might walk on as an old bachelor, too cautious to be caught at all. But none believed that he would become the victim of a grand passion for a poor, reticent, high-bred, high-minded specimen of womanhood. Such however, was now his condition.

He had an uncle, a clergyman, living at Salisbury, a prebendary there, who was a man of the world, and in whom Harry trusted more than in any other member of his own family. His mother had been the sister of the Rev. Henry Fitzackerly Chamberlaine; and as Mr. Chamberlaine had never married, much of his solicitude was bestowed upon his nephew.

“Don’t, my dear fellow,” had been the prebendary’s advice when he was taken over to see Miss Lowther. “She is a lady, no doubt; but you would never be your own master, and you would be a poor man till you died. An easy temper and a little money are almost as common in our rank of life as destitution and obstinacy.” On the day after this advice was given, Harry Gilmore made his formal offer.

CHAPTER II

FLO'S RED BALL

"You should give him an answer, dear, one way or the other." These wise words were spoken by Mrs. Fenwick to her friend as they sat together, with their work in their hands, on a garden seat under a cedar tree. It was an August evening after dinner, and the Vicar was out about his parish. The two elder children were playing in the garden, and the two young women were alone together.

"Of course I shall give him an answer. What answer does he wish?"

"You know what answer he wishes. If any man was ever in earnest he is."

"Am I not doing the best I can for him in waiting—to see whether I can say yes?"

"It cannot be well for him to be in suspense on such a matter; and, dear Mary, it cannot be well for you either. One always feels that when a girl bids a man to wait, she will take him after a while. It always comes to that. If you had been at home at Loring, the time would not have been much; but, being so near to him, and seeing him every day, must be bad. You must both be in a state of fever."

"Then I will go back to Loring."

"No; not now, till you have positively made up your mind, and given him an answer one way or the other. You could not go now and leave him in doubt. Take him at once, and have done with it. He is as good as gold."

In answer to this, Mary for a while said nothing, but went sedulously on with her work.

"Mamma," said a little girl, running up, followed by a nursery-maid, "the ball's in the water!"

The child was a beautiful fair-haired little darling about four-and-a-half years old, and a boy, a year younger, and a little shorter, and a little stouter, was toddling after her.

"The ball in the water, Flo! Can't Jim get it out?"

"Jim's gone, mamma."

Then Jane, the nursery-maid, proceeded to explain that the ball had rolled in and had been carried down the stream to some bushes, and that it was caught there just out of reach of all that she, Jane, could do with a long stick for its recovery. Jim, the gardener, was not to be found; and they were in despair lest the ball should become wet through and should perish.

Mary at once saw her opportunity of escape,—her opportunity for that five minutes of thought by herself which she needed. "I'll come, Flo, and see what can be done," said Mary.

"Do; 'cause you is so big," said the little girl.

"We'll see if my long arms won't do as well as Jim's," said Mary; "only Jim would go in, perhaps, which I certainly shall not do." Then she took Flo by the hand, and together they ran down to the margin of the river.

There lay the treasure, a huge red inflated ball, just stopped in its downward current by a short projecting stick. Jim could have got it certainly, because he could have suspended himself over the stream from a bough, and could have dislodged the ball, and have floated it on to the bank.

"Lean over, Mary,—a great deal, and we'll hold you," said Flo, to whom her ball was at this moment worth any effort. Mary did lean over, and poked at it, and at last thought that she would trust herself to the bough, as Jim would have done, and became more and more venturous, and at last touched the ball, and then, at last,—fell into the river! Immediately there was a scream and a roar, and a splashing about of skirts and petticoats, and by the time that Mrs. Fenwick was on the bank, Mary Lowther had extricated herself, and had triumphantly brought out Flo's treasure with her.

"Mary, are you hurt?" said her friend.

"What should hurt me? Oh, dear, oh, dear! I never fell into a river before. My darling Flo, don't be unhappy. It's such good fun. Only you mustn't fall in yourself, till you're as big as I am." Flo was in an agony of tears, not deigning to look at the rescued ball.

"You do not mean that your head has been under?" said Mrs. Fenwick.

"My face was, and I felt so odd. For about half a moment I had a sound of Ophelia in my ears. Then I was laughing at myself for being such a goose."

"You'd better come up and go to bed, dear; and I'll get you something warm."

"I won't go to bed, and I won't have anything warm; but I will change my clothes. What an adventure! What will Mr. Fenwick say?"

"What will Mr. Gilmore say?"

To this Mary Lowther made no answer, but went straight up to the house, and into her room, and changed her clothes.

While she was there Fenwick and Gilmore both

appeared at the open window of the drawing-room in which Mrs. Fenwick was sitting. She had known well enough that Harry Gilmore would not let the evening pass without coming to the vicarage, and at one time had hoped to persuade Mary Lowther to give her verdict on this very day. Both she and her husband were painfully anxious that Harry might succeed. Fenwick had loved the man dearly for many years, and Janet Fenwick had loved him since she had known him as her husband's friend. They both felt that he was showing more of manhood than they had expected from him in the persistency of his love, and that he deserved his reward. And they both believed also that for Mary herself it would be a prosperous and a happy marriage. And then, where is the married woman who does not wish that the maiden friend who comes to stay with her should find a husband in her house? The parson and his wife were altogether of one mind in this matter, and thought that Mary Lowther ought to be made to give herself to Harry Gilmore.

"What do you think has happened?" said Mrs. Fenwick, coming to the window, which opened down to the ground. "Mary Lowther has fallen into the river."

"Fallen where?" shouted Gilmore, putting up both his hands, and seeming to prepare himself to rush away among the river gods in search of his love.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Gilmore, she's upstairs, quite safe,—only she has had a ducking." Then the circumstances were explained, and the papa declared magisterially that Flo must not play any more with her ball near the river,—an order to which it was not probable that much close attention would ever be paid.

"I suppose Miss Lowther will have gone to bed?" said Gilmore.

"On the contrary, I expect her every moment. I suggested bed, and warm drinks, and cossetting; but she would have none of it. She scrambled out all by herself, and seemed to think it very good fun."

"Come in at any rate and have some tea," said the Vicar. "If you start before eleven, I'll walk half the way back with you."

In the mean time, in spite of her accident, Mary had gained the opportunity that she had required. The point for self-meditation was not so much whether she would or would not accept Mr. Gilmore now, as that other point;—was she or was she not wrong to keep him in suspense. She knew very well that she would not accept him now. It seemed to her that a girl should know a man very thoroughly before she would be justified in trusting herself altogether to his hands, and she thought that her knowledge of Mr. Gilmore was insufficient. It might however be the case that in such circumstances duty required her to give him at once an unhesitating answer. She did not find herself to be a bit nearer to knowing him and to loving him than she was a month since. Her friend Janet had complained again and again of the suspense to which she was subjecting the man;—but she knew on the other hand that her friend Janet did this in her intense anxiety to promote the match. Was it wrong to say to the man—"I will wait and try?" Her friend told her that to say that she would wait and try, was in truth to say that she would take him at some future time;—that any girl who said so had almost committed herself to such a decision;—that the very fact that she was waiting and trying to love a man ought to bind

her to the man at last. Such certainly had not been her own idea. As far as she could at present look into her own future feelings, she did not think that she could ever bring herself to say that she would be this man's wife. There was a solemnity about the position which had never come fully home to her before she had been thus placed. Everybody around her told her that the man's happiness was really bound up in her reply. If this were so,—and she in truth believed that it was so,—was she not bound to give him every chance in her power? And yet because she still doubted, she was told by her friend that she was behaving badly! She would believe her friend, would confess her fault, and would tell her lover in what most respectful words of denial she could mould, that she would not be his wife. For herself personally, there would be no sorrow in this, and no regret.

Her ducking had given her time for all this thought; and then, having so decided, she went downstairs. She was met, of course, with various inquiries about her bath. Mr. Gilmore was all pity, as though the accident was the most serious thing in the world. Mr. Fenwick was all mirth, as though there had never been a better joke. Mrs. Fenwick, who was perhaps unwise in her impatience, was specially anxious that her two guests might be left together. She did not believe that Mary Lowther would ever say the final No; and yet she thought also that, if it were so, the time had quite come in which Mary Lowther ought to say the final Yes.

“Let us go down and look at the spot,” she said after tea.

So they went down. It was a beautiful August night. There was no moon, and the twilight was over;

but still it was not absolutely dark; and the air was as soft as a mother's kiss to her sleeping child. They walked down together, four abreast, across the lawn, and thence they reached a certain green orchard path that led down to the river. Mrs. Fenwick purposely went on with the lover, leaving Mary with her husband, in order that there might be no appearance of a scheme. She would return with her husband, and then there might be a ramble among the paths, and the question would be pressed, and the thing might be settled.

They saw through the gloom the spot where Mary had scrambled, and the water which had then been bright and smiling, was now black and awful.

"To think that you should have been in there!" said Harry Gilmore, shuddering.

"To think that she should ever have got out again!" said the parson.

"It looks frightful in the dark," said Mrs. Fenwick. "Come away, Frank. It makes me sick." And the charming schemer took her husband's arm, and continued the round of the garden. "I have been talking to her, and I think she would take him if he would ask her now."

The other pair of course followed them. Mary's mind was so fully made up, at this moment, that she almost wished that her companion might ask the question. She had been told that she was misusing him; and she would misuse him no longer. She had a firm No, as it were, within her grasp, and a resolution that she would not be driven from it. But he walked on beside her talking of the water, and of the danger, and of the chance of a cold, and got no nearer to the subject than to bid her think what suffering she would have caused had she failed to extricate herself from the

pool. He also had made up his mind. Something had been said by himself of a certain day when last he had pleaded his cause; and that day would not come round till the morrow. He considered himself pledged to restrain himself till then; but on the morrow he would come to her.

There was a little gate which led from the parsonage garden through the churchyard to a field path, by which was the nearest way to Hampton Privets.

"I'll leave you here," he said, "because I don't want to make Fenwick come out again to-night. You won't mind going up through the garden alone?"

"Oh dear, no."

"And, Miss Lowther,—pray, pray take care of yourself. I hardly think you ought to have been out again to-night."

"It was nothing, Mr. Gilmore. You make infinitely too much of it."

"How can I make too much of anything that regards you? You will be at home to-morrow?"

"Yes, I fancy so."

"Do remain at home. I intend to come down after lunch. Do remain at home." He held her by the hand as he spoke to her, and she promised him that she would obey him. He clearly was entitled to her obedience on such a point. Then she slowly made her way round the garden, and entered the house at the front door, some quarter of an hour after the others.

Why should she refuse him? What was it that she wanted in the world? She liked him, his manners, his character, his ways, his mode of life, and after a fashion she liked his person. If there was more of love in the world than this, she did not think that it would ever come in her way. Up to this time of her life she had

never felt any such feeling. If not for her own sake, why should she not do it for him? Why should he not be made happy? She had risked a plunge in the water to get Flo her ball, and she liked him better than she liked Flo. It seemed that her mind had been altogether changed by that stroll through the dark alleys.

"Well," said Janet, "how is it to be?"

"He is to come to-morrow, and I do not know how it will be," she said, turning away to her own room.

CHAPTER III

SAM BRATTLE

It was about eleven o'clock when Gilmore passed through the wicket leading from the vicarage garden to the churchyard. The path he was about to take crossed simply a corner of the church precincts, as it came at once upon a public footway leading from the fields through the churchyard to the town. There was, of course, no stopping the public path, but Fenwick had been often advised to keep a lock on his own gate, as otherwise it almost seemed that the vicarage gardens were open to all Bullhampton. But the lock had never been put on. The gate was the way by which he and his family went to church, and the parson was accustomed to say that however many keys there might be provided, he knew that there would never be one in his pocket when he wanted it. And he was wont to add, when his wife would tease him on the subject, and they who desired to come in decently were welcome, and that they who were minded to make an entrance indecently would not be debarred by such rails and fences as hemmed in the vicarage grounds. Gilmore, as he passed through the corner of the churchyard, clearly saw a man standing near to the stile leading from the fields. Indeed, this man was quite close to him, although, from the want of light and the posture of the man, the face was invisible to him. But he knew the fellow to be a stranger to Bullhampton. The dress was strange, the manner was strange, and the mode of standing was strange. Gil-

more had lived at Bullhampton all his life, and, without much thought on the subject, knew Bullhampton ways. The jacket which the man wore was a town-made jacket, a jacket that had come farther a-field even than Salisbury; and the man's gaiters had a savour which was decidedly not of Wiltshire. Dark as it was, he could see so much as this. "Good night, my friend," said Gilmore, in a sharp cheery voice. The man muttered something, and passed on as though to the village. There had, however, been something in his position which made Gilmore think that the stranger had intended to trespass on his friend's garden. He crossed the stile into the fields, however, without waiting,—without having waited for half a moment, and immediately saw the figure of a second man standing down, hidden as it were in the ditch; and though he could discover no more than the cap and shoulders of the man through the gloom, he was sure he knew who it was that owned the cap and shoulders. He did not speak again, but passed on quickly, thinking what he might best do. The man whom he had seen and recognised had latterly been talked of as a discredit to his family, and anything but an honour to the usually respectable inhabitants of Bullhampton.

On the further side of the church from the town was a farmyard, in the occupation of one of Lord Trowbridge's tenants,—a man who had ever been very keen at preventing the inroads of trespassers, to which he had, perhaps, been driven by the fact that his land was traversed by various public highways. Now a public pathway through pasture is a nuisance, as it is impossible to induce those who use it to keep themselves to one beaten track; but a pathway through cornfields is worse, for, let what pains may be taken, wheat, beans,

and barley will be torn down and trampled under foot. And yet in apportioning his rents, no landlord takes all this into consideration. Farmer Trumbull considered it a good deal, and was often a wrathful man. There was at any rate no right of way across his farmyard, and here he might keep as big a dog as he chose, chained or unchained. Harry Gilmore knew the dog well, and stood for a moment leaning on the gate.

"Who be there?" said the voice of the farmer.

"Is that you, Mr. Trumbull? It is I,—Mr. Gilmore. I want to get round to the front of the parson's house."

"Zurely, zurely," said the farmer, coming forward and opening the gate. "Be there anything wrong about, Squire?"

"I don't know. I think there is. Speak softly. I fancy there are men lying in the churchyard."

"I be a-thinking so, too, Squire. Bone'm was a growling just now like the old 'un." Bone'm was the name of the bull-dog as to which Gilmore had been solicitous as he looked over the gate. "What is't t'ey're up to? Not bugglary."

"Our friend's apricots, perhaps. But I'll just move round to the front. Do you and Bone'm keep a lookout here."

"Never fear, Squire; never fear. Me and Bone'm together is a'most too much for 'em, bugglars and all." Then he led Mr. Gilmore through the farmyard, and out on the road, Bone'm growling a low growl as he passed away.

The Squire hurried along the high road, past the church, and in at the Vicarage front gate. Knowing the place well, he could have made his way round into the garden; but he thought it better to go to the front

door. There was no light to be seen from the windows; but almost all the rooms of the house looked out into the garden at the back. He knocked sharply, and in a minute or two the door was opened by the parson in person.

"Frank," said the Squire.

"Halloo! is that you? What's up now?"

"Men who ought to be in bed. I came across two men hanging about your gate in the churchyard, and I'm not sure there wasn't a third."

"They're up to nothing. They often sit and smoke there."

"These fellows were up to something. The man I saw plainest was a stranger, and just the sort of man who won't do your parishioners any good to be among them. The other was Sam Brattle."

"Whew—w—," said the parson.

"He has gone utterly to the dogs," said the Squire.

"He's on the road, Harry; but nobody has gone while he's still going. I had some words with him in his father's presence last week, and he followed me afterwards, and told me he'd see it out with me. I wouldn't tell you, because I didn't want to set you more against them."

"I wish they were out of the place,—the whole lot of them."

"I don't know that they'd do better elsewhere than here. I suppose Mr. Sam is going to keep his word with me."

"Only for the look of that other fellow, I shouldn't think they meant anything serious," said Gilmore.

"I don't suppose they do, but I'll be on the lookout."

"Shall I stay with you, Frank?"

"Oh, no; I've a life-preserver, and I'll take a round of the gardens. You come with me, and you can pass home that way. The chances are they'll mizzle away to bed, as they've seen you, and heard Bone'm,—and probably heard too every word you said to Trumbull."

He then got his hat and the short, thick stick of which he had spoken, and turning the key of the door, put it in his pocket. Then the two friends went round by the kitchen garden, and so through to the orchard, and down to the churchyard gate. Hitherto they had seen nothing, and heard nothing, and Fenwick was sure that the men had made their way through the churchyard to the village.

"But they may come back," said Gilmore.

"I'll be about if they do," said the parson.

"What is one against three? You had better let me stay."

Fenwick laughed at this, saying that it would be quite as rational to propose that they should keep watch every night.

"But, hark!" said the Squire, with a mind evidently perturbed.

"Don't be alarmed about us," said the parson.

"If anything should happen to Mary Lowther!"

"That, no doubt, is matter of anxiety, to which may, perhaps, be added some trifle of additional feeling on the score of Janet and the children. But I'll do my best. If the women knew that you and I were patrolling the place, they'd be frightened out of their wits."

Then Gilmore, who never liked that there should be a laugh against himself, took his leave and walked home across the fields. Fenwick passed up through

the garden, and, when he was near the terrace which ran along the garden front of the house, he thought that he heard a voice. He stood under the shade of a wall dark with ivy, and distinctly heard whispering on the other side of it. As far as he could tell there were the voices of more than two men. He wished now that he had kept Gilmore with him,—not that he was personally afraid of the trespassers, for his courage was of that steady settled kind which enables the possessor to remember that men who are doing deeds of darkness are ever afraid of those whom they are injuring; but had there been an ally with him his prospect of catching one or more of the ruffians would have been greatly increased. Standing where he was he would probably be able to interrupt them, should they attempt to enter the house; but in the mean time they might be stripping his fruit from the wall. They were certainly, at present, in the kitchen garden, and he was not minded to leave them there at such work as they might have in hand. Having paused to think of this, he crept along under the wall, close to the house, towards the passage by which he could reach them. But they had not heard him, nor had they waited among the fruit. When he was near the corner of the wall, one leading man came round within a foot or two of the spot on which he stood; and, before he could decide on what he would do, the second had appeared. He rushed forward with the loaded stick in his hand, but, knowing its weight, and remembering the possibility of the comparative innocence of the intruders, he hesitated to strike. A blow on the head would have brained a man, and a knock on the arm with such an instrument would break the bone. In a moment he found his left hand on the leading man's

throat, and the man's foot behind his heel. He fell, but as he fell he did strike heavily, cutting upwards with his weapon, and bringing the heavy weight of lead at the end of it on to the man's shoulder. He stumbled rather than fell, but when he regained his footing, the man was gone. That man was gone, and two others were following him down towards the gate at the bottom of the orchard. Of these two, in a few strides, he was able to catch the hindermost, and then he found himself wrestling with Sam Brattle.

"Sam," said he, speaking as well as he could with his short breath, "if you don't stand, I'll strike you with the life-preserver."

Sam made another struggle, trying to seize the weapon, and the parson hit him with it on the right arm.

"You've smashed that anyway, Mr. Fenwick," said the man.

"I hope not; but do you come along with me quietly, or I'll smash something else. I'll hit you on the head if you attempt to move away. What were you doing here?"

Brattle made no answer, but walked along towards the house at the parson's left hand, the parson holding him the while by the neck of his jacket, and swinging the life-preserver in his right hand. In this way he took him round to the front of the house, and then began to think what he would do with him.

"That, after all, you should be at this work, Sam!"

"What work is it, then?"

"Prowling about my place, after midnight, with a couple of strange blackguards."

"There ain't so much harm in that, as I knows of."

"Who were the men, Sam?"

“Who was the men?”

“Yes;—who were they?”

“Just friends of mine, Mr. Fenwick. I shan't say no more about 'em. You've got me, and you've smashed my arm, and now what is it you're a-going to do with me? I ain't done no harm,—only just walked about, like.”

To tell the truth, our friend the parson did not quite know what he meant to do with the Tartar he had caught. There were reasons which made him very unwilling to hand over Sam Brattle to the village constable. Sam had a mother and sister who were among the Vicar's first favourites in the parish; and though old Jacob Brattle, the father, was not so great a favourite, and was a man whom the Squire, his landlord, held in great disfavour, Mr. Fenwick would desire, if possible, to spare the family. And of Sam, himself, he had had high hopes; though those hopes, for the last eighteen months, had been becoming fainter and fainter. Upon the whole, he was much averse to knocking up the groom, the only man who lived on the parsonage except himself, and dragging Sam into the village. “I wish I knew,” he said, “what you and your friends were going to do. I hardly think it has come to that with you, that you'd try to break into the house and cut our throats.”

“We warn't after no breaking in, nor no cutting of throats, Mr. Fenwick. We warn't indeed!”

“What shall you do with yourself, to-night, if I let you off?”

“Just go home to father's, sir; not a foot else, s'help me.”

“One of your friends, as you call them, will have to go to the doctor, if I am not very much mistaken; for

the rap I gave you was nothing to what he got. You're all right?"

"It hurt, sir, I can tell ye;—but that won't matter."

"Well, Sam,—there; you may go. I shall be after you to-morrow, and the last word I say to you, to-night, is this;—as far as I can see, you're on the road to the gallows. It isn't pleasant to be hung, and I would advise you to change your road." So saying, he let go his hold, and stood waiting till Sam should have taken his departure.

"Don't be a-coming after me, to-morrow, parson, please," said the man.

"I shall see your mother, certainly."

"Dont'ee tell her of my being here, Mr. Fenwick, and nobody shan't ever come anigh this place again,—not in the way of priggging anything."

"You fool, you!" said the parson. "Do you think that it is to save anything that I might lose, that I let you go now? Don't you know that the thing I want to save is you,—you,—you; you helpless, idle, good-for-nothing reprobate? Go home, and be sure that I shall do the best I can according to my lights. I fear that my lights are bad lights, in that they have allowed me to let you go."

When he had seen Sam take his departure through the front gate, he returned to the house, and found that his wife, who had gone to bed, had come downstairs in search of him.

"Frank, you have frightened me so terribly! Where have you been?"

"Thief-catching. And I'm afraid I've about split one fellow's back. I caught another, but I let him go."

"What on earth do you mean, Frank?"

Then he told her the whole story,—how Gilmore

had seen the men, and had come up to him; how he had gone out and had a tussle with one man, whom he had, as he thought, hurt; and how he had then caught another, while the third escaped.

"We ain't safe in our beds, then," said the wife.

"You ain't safe in yours, my dear, because you chose to leave it; but I hope you're safe out of it. I doubt whether the melons and peaches are safe. The truth is, there ought to be a gardener's cottage on the place, and I must build one. I wonder whether I hurt that fellow much. I seemed to hear the bone crunch."

"Oh, Frank!"

"But what could I do? I got that thing because I thought it safer than a pistol, but I really think it's worse. I might have murdered them all, if I'd lost my temper,—and just for half-a-dozen apricots!"

"And what became of the man you took?"

"I let him go."

"Without doing anything to him?"

"Well; he got a tap too."

"Did you know him?"

"Yes, I knew him,—well."

"Who was he, Frank?"

The parson was silent for a moment, and then he answered her. "It was Sam Brattle."

"Sam Brattle, coming to rob?"

"He's been at it, I fear, for months, in some shape."

"And what shall you do?"

"I hardly know as yet. It would about kill her and Fanny, if they were told all that I suspect. They are stiff-necked, obstinate, ill-conditioned people—that is, the men. But I think Gilmore has been a little hard on them. The father and brother are honest men. Come;—we'll go to bed."

CHAPTER IV

THERE IS NO ONE ELSE

ON the following morning there was of course a considerable amount of conversation at the Vicarage as to the affairs of the previous evening. There was first of all an examination of the fruit; but as this was made without taking Jem the gardener into confidence, no certain conclusion could be reached. It was clear, however, that no robbery for the purpose of sale had been made. An apricot or two might have been taken, and perhaps an assault made on an unripe peach. Mr. Fenwick was himself nearly sure that garden spoilation was not the purpose of the assailants, though it suited him to let his wife entertain that idea. The men would hardly have come from the kitchen garden up to the house and round by the corner at which he had met them, if they were seeking fruit. Presuming it to have been their intention to attempt the drawing-room windows, he would have expected to meet them as he did meet them. From the garden the Vicar and the two ladies went down to the gate, and from thence over the stile to Farmer Trumbull's farmyard. The farmer had not again seen the men, after the Squire had left him, nor had he heard them. To him the parson said nothing of his encounter, and nothing of that blow on the man's back. From thence Mr. Fenwick went on to the town, and the ladies returned to the Vicarage.

The only person whom the parson at once con-

sulted was the surgeon,—Dr. Cuttenden, as he was called. No man with an injured shoulder-blade had come to him last night or that morning. A man, he said, might receive a very violent blow on his back, in the manner in which the fellow had been struck, and might be disabled for days from any great personal exertion, without having a bone broken. If the blade of his shoulder were broken, the man—so thought the doctor—could not travel far on foot, would hardly be able to get away to any of the neighbouring towns unless he were carried. Of Sam Brattle the parson said nothing to the doctor; but when he had finished his morning's work about the town, he walked on to the mill.

In the mean time the two ladies remained at home at the Parsonage. The excitement occasioned by the events of the previous night was probably a little damaged by the knowledge that Mr. Gilmore was coming. The coming of Mr. Gilmore on this occasion was so important that even the terrible idea of burglars, and the sensation arising from the use of that deadly weapon which had been produced at the breakfast table during the morning, were robbed of some of their interest. They did not keep possession of the minds of the two ladies as they would have done had there been no violent interrupting cause. But here was the violent interrupting cause, and by the time that lunch was on the table, Sam Brattle and his comrades were forgotten.

Very little was said between the two women on that morning respecting Mr. Gilmore. Mrs. Fenwick, who had allowed herself to be convinced that Mary would act with great impropriety if she did not accept the man, thought that further speech might only render

her friend obstinate. Mary, who knew the inside of her friend's mind very clearly, and who loved and respected her friend, could hardly fix her own mind. During the past night it had been fixed, or nearly fixed, two different ways. She had first determined that she would refuse her lover,—as to which resolve, for some hours or so, she had been very firm; then that she would accept him,—as to which she had ever, when most that way inclined, entertained some doubt as to the possibility of her uttering that word "Yes."

"If it be that other women don't love better than I love him, I wonder that they ever get married at all," she said to herself.

She was told that she was wrong to keep the man in suspense, and she believed it. Had she not been so told, she would have thought that some further waiting would have been of the three alternatives the best.

"I shall be upstairs with the bairns," said Mrs. Fenwick, as she left the dining-room after lunch, "so that if you prefer the garden to the drawing-room, it will be free."

"Oh, dear, how solemn and ceremonious you make it."

"It is solemn, Mary; I don't know how anything can be more solemn, short of going to heaven or the other place. But I really don't see why there should be any doubt or difficulty."

There was something in the tone in which these words were said which almost made Mary Lowther again decide against the man. The man had a home and an income, and was Squire of the parish; and therefore there need be no difficulty! When she compared Mr. Fenwick and Mr. Gilmore together, she

found that she liked Mr. Fenwick the best. She thought him to be the more clever, the higher spirited, the most of a man of the two. She certainly was not the least in love with her friend's husband; but then she was just as little in love with Mr. Gilmore.

At about half-past two Mr. Gilmore made his appearance, standing at the open window.

"May I come in?" he said.

"Of course you may come in."

"Mrs. Fenwick is not here?"

"She is in the house, I think, if you want her."

"Oh no. I hope you were not frightened last night. I have not seen Frank this morning; but I hear from Mr. Trumbull that there was something of a row."

"There was a row, certainly. Mr. Fenwick struck some of the men, and he is afraid that he hurt one of them."

"I wish he had broken their heads. I take it there was a son of one of my tenants there, who is about as bad as he can be. Frank will believe me now. I hope you were not frightened here."

"I heard nothing of it till this morning."

After that there was a pause. He had told himself as he came along that the task before him could not be easy and pleasant. To declare a passion to the girl he loves may be very pleasant work to the man who feels almost sure that his answer will not be against him. It may be an easy task enough even when there is a doubt. The very possession of the passion,—or even its pretence,—gives the man a liberty which he has a pleasure and a pride in using. But this is the case when the man dashes boldly at his purpose without preconcerted arrangements. Such

pleasure, if it ever was a pleasure to him,—such excitement at least, was come and gone with Harry Gilmore. He had told his tale, and had been desired to wait. Now he had come again at a fixed hour to be informed—like a servant waiting for a place—whether it was thought that he would suit. The servant out of place, however, would have had this advantage, that he would receive his answer without the necessity of further eloquence on his own part. With the lover it was different. It was evident that Mary Lowther would not say to him, “I have considered the matter, and I think that, upon the whole, you will do.” It was necessary that he should ask the question again, and ask it as a suppliant.

“Mary,” he said, beginning with words that he had fixed for himself as he came up the garden, “it is six weeks, I think, since I asked you to be my wife; and now I have come to ask you again.”

She made him no immediate answer, but sat as though waiting for some further effort of his eloquence.

“I do not think you doubt my truth, or the warmth of my affection. If you trust in them——”

“I do; I do.”

“Then I don’t know that I can say anything further. Nothing that I can say now will make you love me. I have not that sort of power which would compel a girl to come into my arms.”

“I don’t understand that kind of power,—how any man can have it with any girl.”

“They say that it is so; but I do not flatter myself that it is so with me; and I do not think that it would be so with any man over you. Perhaps I may assure you that, as far as I know myself at present, all my future happiness must depend on your answer. It will

not kill me—to be refused; at least, I suppose not. But it will make me wish that it would.” Having so spoken he waited for her reply.

She believed every word that he said. And she liked him so well that, for his own sake, she desired that he might be gratified. As far as she knew herself, she had no desire to be Harry Gilmore’s wife. The position was not even one in which she could allow herself to look for consolation on one side, for disappointments on the other. She had read about love, and talked about love; and she desired to be in love. Certainly she was not in love with this man. She had begun to doubt whether it would ever be given to her to love,—to love as her friend Janet loved Frank Fenwick. Janet loved her husband’s very footsteps, and seemed to eat with his palate, hear with his ears, and see with his eyes. She was, as it were, absolutely a bone from her husband’s rib. Mary thought that she was sure that she could never have that same feeling towards Henry Gilmore. And yet it might come; or something might come which would do almost as well. It was likely that Janet’s nature was softer and sweeter than her own,—more prone to adapt itself, like ivy to a strong tree. For herself, it might be, that she could never become as the ivy; but that, nevertheless, she might be the true wife of a true husband. But if ever she was to be the true wife of Harry Gilmore, she could not to-day say that it should be so.

“I suppose I must answer you,” she said, very gently.

“If you tell me that you are not ready to do so I will wait, and come again. I shall never change my mind. You may be sure of that.”

"But that is just what I may not do, Mr. Gilmore."

"Who says so?"

"My own feelings tell me so. I have no right to keep you in suspense, and I will not do it. I respect and esteem you most honestly. I have so much liking for you that I do not mind owning that I wish that it were more. Mr. Gilmore, I like you so much that I would make a great sacrifice for you; but I cannot sacrifice my own honesty or your happiness by making believe that I love you."

For a few moments he sat silent, and then there came over his face a look of inexpressible anguish,—a look as though the pain were almost more than he could bear. She could not keep her eyes from his face; and, in her woman's pity, she almost wished that her words had been different.

"And must that be all?" he asked.

"What else can I say, Mr. Gilmore?"

"If that must be all, it will be to me a doom that I shall not know how to bear. I cannot live here without you. I have thought about you till you have become mixed with every tree and every cottage about the place. I did not know of myself that I could become such a slave to a passion. Mary, say that you will wait again. Try it once more. I would not ask for this, but that you have told me that there was no one else."

"Certainly, there is no one else."

"Then let me wait again. It can do you no harm. If there should come any man more fortunate than I am, you can tell me, and I shall know that it is over. I ask no sacrifice from you, and no pledge; but I give you mine. I shall not change."

"There must be no such promise, Mr. Gilmore."

"But there is the promise. I certainly shall not change. When three months are over I will come to you again."

She tried to think whether she was bound to tell him that her answer must be taken as final, or whether she might allow the matter to stand as he proposed, with some chance of a result that might be good for him. On one point she was quite sure,—that if she left him now, with an understanding that he should again renew his offer after a period of three months, she must go away from Bullhampton. If there was any possibility that she should learn to love him, such feeling would arise within her more quickly in his absence than in his presence. She would go home to Loring, and try to bring herself to accept him.

"I think," she said, "that what we now say had better be the last of it."

"It shall not be the last of it. I will try again. What is there that I can do, so that I may make myself worthy of you?"

"It is no question of worthiness, Mr. Gilmore. Who can say how his heart is moved,—and why? I shall go home to Loring; and you may be sure of this, that if there be anything that you should hear of me, I will let you know."

Then he took her hand in his own, held it for a while, pressed it to his lips, and left her. She was by no means contented with herself, and, to tell the truth, was ashamed to let her friend know what she had done. And yet how could she have answered him in other words? It might be that she could teach herself to be contented with the amount of regard which she entertained for him. It might be that she could per-

suade herself to be his wife; and if so, why should he not have the chance,—the chance which he professed that he was so anxious to retain? He had paid her the greatest compliment which a man can pay a woman, and she owed him everything,—except herself. She was hardly sure even now that if the proposition had come to her by letter the answer might not have been of a different nature.

As soon as he was gone she went upstairs to the nursery, and thence to Mrs. Fenwick's bedroom. Flo was there, but Flo was soon dismissed. Mary began her story instantly, before a question could be asked.

"Janet," she said, "I am going home—at once."

"Why so?"

"Because it is best. Nothing more is settled than was settled before. When he asks me whether he may come again, how can I say that he may not? What can I say, except that as far I can see now, I cannot be his wife?"

"You have not accepted him, then?"

"No."

"I believe that you would, if he had asked you last night."

"Most certainly I should not. I may doubt when I am talking behind his back; but when I meet him face to face I cannot do it."

"I think you have been wrong,—very wrong and very foolish."

"In not taking a man I do not love," said Mary.

"You do love him; but you are longing for you do not know what; some romance,—some grand passion,—something that will never come."

"Shall I tell you what I want?"

"If you please."

"A feeling such as you have for Frank. You are my model; I want nothing beyond that."

"That comes after marriage. Frank was very little to me till we were man and wife. He'll tell you the same. I don't know whether I didn't almost dislike him when I married him."

"Oh, Janet!"

"Certainly the sort of love you are thinking of comes afterwards;—when the interests of two people are the same. Frank was very well as a lover."

"Don't I remember it?"

"You were a child."

"I was fifteen; and don't I remember how all the world used to change for you when he was coming? There wasn't a ribbon you wore but you wore it for him; you dressed yourself in his eyes; you lived by his thoughts."

"That was all after I was engaged. If you would accept Harry Gilmore, you would do just the same."

"I must be sure that it would be so. I am now almost sure that it would not."

"And why do you want to go home?"

"That he may not be pestered by having me near him. I think it will be better for him that I should go."

"And he is to ask you again?"

"He says that he will—in three months. But you should tell him that it will be better that he should not. I would advise him to travel,—if I were his friend, like you."

"And leave all his duties, and his pleasures, and his house, and his property, because of your face and figure, my dear! I don't think any woman is worth so much to a man."

Mary bit her lips in sorrow for what she had said. "I was thinking of his own speech about himself, Janet, not of my worth. It does not astonish you more than it does me that such a man as Mr. Gilmore should be perplexed in spirit for such a cause. But he says that he is perplexed."

"Of course he is perplexed, and of course I was in joke. Only it does seem so hard upon him! I should like to shake you till you fell into his arms. I know it would be best for you. You will go on examining your own feelings and doubting about your heart, and waiting for something that will never come till you will have lost your time. That is the way old maids are made. If you marry Harry, by the time your first child was born you would think that he was Jupiter,—just as I think that Frank is."

Mrs. Fenwick owned, however, that as matters stood at present, it would be best that Mary should return home; and letters were written that afternoon to say that she would be at Loring by the middle of next week.

The Vicar was not seen till dinner-time, and then he came home in considerable perplexity of spirit. It was agreed between the two women that the fate of Harry Gilmore, as far as it had been decided, should be told to Mr. Fenwick by his wife; and she, though she was vexed, and almost angry with Mary, promised to make the best of it.

"She'll lose him at last; that'll be the end of it," said the parson, as he scoured his face with a towel after washing it.

"I never saw a man so much in love in my life," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"But iron won't remain long at red heat," said he.

“What she says herself would be the best for him. He’ll break up and go away for a time, and then, when he comes back, there’ll be somebody else. She’ll live to repent it.”

“When she’s away from him there may be a change.”

“Fiddlestick!” said the parson.

Mary, when she met him before dinner, could see that he was angry with her, but she bore it with the utmost meekness. She believed of herself that she was much to blame in that she could not fall in love with Harry Gilmore. Mrs. Fenwick had also asked a question or two about Sam Brattle during the dressing of her husband; but he had declined to say anything on that subject till they two should be secluded together for the night.

CHAPTER V

THE MILLER

MR. FENWICK reached Brattle's mill about two o'clock in the day. During the whole morning, while saying comfortable words to old women, and gently rebuking young maidens, he had been thinking of Sam Brattle and his offences. He had not been in the parish very long, not over five or six years, but he had been there long enough to see Sam grow out of boyhood into manhood; and at his first coming to the parish, for the first two or three years, the lad had been a favourite with him. Young Brattle could run well, leap well, fish well, and do a good turn of work about his father's mill. And he could also read and write, and cast accounts, and was a clever fellow. The parson, though he had tried his hand with energy at making the man, had, perhaps, done something towards marring him; and it may be that some feeling of this was on Mr. Fenwick's conscience. A gentleman's favourite in a country village, when of Sam Brattle's age, is very apt to be spoiled by the kindness that is shown to him. Sam had spent many a long afternoon fishing with the parson, but those fishing days were now more than two years gone by. It had been understood that Sam was to assist his father at the mill; and much good advice as to his trade the lad had received from Mr. Fenwick. There ought to be no more fishing for the young miller, except on special holiday occasions,—no more fishing, at least, during the hours

required for milling purposes. So Mr. Fenwick had said frequently. Nevertheless the old miller attributed his son's idleness in great part to the parson's conduct, and he had so told the parson more than once. Of late Sam Brattle had certainly not been a good son, had neglected his work, disobeyed his father, and brought trouble on a household which had much suffering to endure independently of that which he might bring upon it.

Jacob Brattle was a man at this time over sixty-five years of age, and every year of the time had been spent in that mill. He had never known another occupation or another home, and had very rarely slept under another roof. He had married the daughter of a neighbouring farmer, and had had some twelve or fourteen children. There were at this time six still living. He himself had ever been a hardworking, sober, honest man. But he was cross-grained, litigious, moody, and tyrannical. He held his mill and about a hundred acres of adjoining meadow land at a rent in which no account was taken either of the building or of the mill privileges attached to it. He paid simply for the land at a rate per acre, which, as both he and his landlord well knew, would make it acceptable on the same terms to any farmer in the parish; and neither for his mill, nor for his land, had he any lease, nor had his father or his grandfather had leases before him. Though he was a clever man in his way, he hardly knew what a lease was. He doubted whether his landlord could dispossess him as long as he paid his rent, but he was not sure. But of this he thought he was sure,—that were Mr. Gilmore to attempt to do such a thing, all Wiltshire would cry out against the deed, and probably the heavens would fall and crush the doer.

He was a man with an unlimited love of justice; but the justice which he loved best was justice to himself. He brooded over injuries done to him,—injuries real or fancied,—till he taught himself to wish that all who hurt him might be crucified for the hurt they did to him. He never forgot, and never wished to forgive. If any prayer came from him, it was a prayer that his own heart might be so hardened that when vengeance came in his way he might take it without stint against the trespasser of the moment. And yet he was not a cruel man. He would almost despise himself, because when the moment for vengeance did come, he would abstain from vengeance. He would dismiss a disobedient servant with curses which would make one's hair stand on end, and would hope within his heart of hearts that before the end of the next week the man with his wife and children might be in the poorhouse. When the end of the next week came, he would send the wife meat, and would give the children bread, and would despise himself for doing so. In matters of religion he was an old Pagan, going to no place of worship, saying no prayer, believing in no creed,—with some vague idea that a supreme power would bring him right at last, if he worked hard, robbed no one, fed his wife and children, and paid his way. To pay his way was the pride of his heart; to be paid on his way was its joy.

In that matter of his quarrel with his landlord he was very bitter. The Squire's father some fifteen years since had given to the miller a verbal promise that the house and mill should be repaired. The old Squire had not been a good man of business, and had gone on with his tenants very much as he had found them, without looking much into the position of each. But

he had, no doubt, said something that amounted to a promise on his own account as to these repairs. He had died soon after, and the repairs had not been effected. A year after his death an application,—almost a demand,—was made upon our Squire by the miller, and the miller had been wrathful even when the Squire said that he would look into it. The Squire did look into it, and came to the conclusion that as he received no rent at all for the house and mill, and as his own property would be improved if the house and mill were made to vanish, and as he had no evidence whatever of any undertaking on his father's part, as any such promise on his father's part must simply have been a promise of a gift of money out of his own pocket, and further as the miller was impudent, he would not repair the mill. Ultimately he offered £20 towards the repairs, which the miller indignantly refused. Readers will be able to imagine how pretty a quarrel there would thus be between the landlord and his tenant. When all this was commencing,—at the time, that is, of the old Squire's death,—Brattle had the name of being a substantial person; but misfortune had come upon him; doctors' bills had been very heavy, his children had drained his resources from him, and it was now known that it set him very hard to pay his way. In regard to the house and the mill, some absolutely essential repairs had been done at his own costs; but the £20 had never been taken.

In some respects the man's fortune in life had been good. His wife was one of those loving, patient, self-denying, almost heavenly human beings, one or two of whom may come across one's path, and who, when found, are generally found in that sphere of life to which this woman belonged. Among the rich there is

that difficulty of the needle's eye; among the poor there is the difficulty of the hardness of their lives. And the miller loved this woman with a perfect love. He hardly knew that he loved her as he did. He could be harsh to her and tyrannical. He could say cutting words to her. But at any time in his life he would have struck over the head, with his staff, another man who should have said a word to hurt her. They had lost many children; but of the six who remained, there were four of whom they might be proud. The eldest was a farmer, married and away, doing well in a far part of the county, beyond Salisbury, on the borders of Hampshire. The father in his emergencies had almost been tempted to ask his son for money; but hitherto he had refrained. A daughter was married to a tradesman at Warminster, and was also doing well. A second son who had once been sickly and weak, was a scholar in his way, and was now a schoolmaster, also at Warminster, and in great repute with the parson of the parish there. There was a second daughter, Fanny, at home, a girl as good as gold, the glory and joy and mainstay of her mother, whom even the miller could not scold,—whom all Bullhampton loved. But she was a plain girl, brown, and somewhat hard-visaged;—a morsel of fruit as sweet as any in the garden, but one that the eye would not select for its outside grace, colour, and roundness. Then there were the two younger. Of Sam, the youngest of all, who was now twenty-one, something has already been said. Between him and Fanny there was,—perhaps it will be better to say there had been,—another daughter. Of all the flock Carry had been her father's darling. She had not been brown or hard-visaged. She was such a morsel of fruit as men do chose, when allowed to range and

pick through the whole length of the garden wall. Fair she had been, with laughing eyes, and floating curls; strong in health, generous in temper, though now and again with something of her father's humour. To her mother's eye she had never been as sweet as Fanny; but to her father she had been as bright and beautiful as the harvest moon. Now she was a thing, somewhere, never to be mentioned! Any man who would have named her to her father's ears, would have encountered instantly the force of his wrath. This was so well known in Bullhampton that there was not one who would dare to suggest to him that she might be saved. But her mother prayed for her daily, and her father thought of her always. It was a great lump upon him, which he must bear to his grave; and for which there could be no release. He did not know whether it was his mind, his heart, or his body that suffered. He only knew that it was there,—a load that could never be lightened. What comfort was it to him now, that he had beaten a miscreant to death's door—that he, with his old hands, had nearly torn the wretch limb from limb—that he had left him all but lifeless, and had walked off scatheless, nobody daring to put a finger on him? The man had been pieced up by some doctor, and was away in Asia, in Africa, in America—soldiering somewhere. He had been a lieutenant in those days, and was probably a lieutenant still. It was nothing to old Brattle where he was. Had he been able to drink the fellow's blood to the last drop, it would not have lightened his load an ounce. He knew that it was so now. Nothing could lighten it;—not though an angel could come and tell him that his girl was a second Magdalen. The Brattles had ever held up their heads. The women, at least, had always been decent.

Jacob Brattle, himself, was a low, thickset man, with an appearance of great strength, which was now submitting itself, very slowly, to the hand of time. He had sharp green eyes, and shaggy eyebrows, with thin lips, and a square chin, a nose which, though its shape was aquiline, protruded but little from his face. His forehead was low and broad, and he was seldom seen without a flat hat upon his head. His hair and very scanty whiskers were grey; but, then too, he was grey from head to foot. The colour of his trade had so clung to him, that no one could say whether that greyish whiteness of his face came chiefly from meal or from sorrow. He was a silent, sad, meditative man, thinking always of the evil things that had been done to him.

CHAPTER VI

BRATTLE'S MILL

WHEN Mr. Fenwick reached the mill, he found old Brattle sitting alone on a fixed bench in front of the house door with a pipe in his mouth. Mary Lowther was quite right in saying that the mill, in spite of its dilapidations,—perhaps by reason of them,—was as pretty as anything in Bullhampton. In the first place it was permeated and surrounded by cool, bright, limpid little streams. One of them ran right through it, as it were, passing between the dwelling-house and the mill, and turning the wheel, which was there placed. This course was, no doubt, artificial, and the water ran more rapidly in it than it did in the neighbouring streamlets. There were sluice-gates, too, by which it could be altogether expelled, or kept up to this or that height; and it was a river absolutely under man's control, in which no water-god could take delight. But there were other natural streams on each side of the building, the one being the main course of the Avon, and the other some offspring of a brooklet, which joined its parent two hundred yards below, and fifty yards from the spot at which the ill-used working water was received back into its mother's idle bosom. Mill and house were thatched, and were very low. There were garrets in the roof, but they were so shaped that they could hardly be said to have walls to them at all, so nearly were they contained by the sloping roof. In front of the building there ran a road,—which after all was no more than a private lane. It crossed the smaller

stream and the mill-run by two wooden bridges; but the river itself had been too large for the bridge-maker's efforts, and here there was a ford, with stepping-stones for foot passengers. The banks on every side were lined with leaning willows, which had been pollarded over and over again, and which with their light-green wavy heads gave the place, from a distance, the appearance of a grove. There was a little porch in front of the house, and outside of that a fixed seat, with a high back, on which old Brattle was sitting when the parson accosted him. He did not rise when Mr. Fenwick addressed him; but he intended no want of courtesy by not doing so. He was on his legs at business during nearly the whole of the day, and why should he not rest his old limbs during the few mid-day minutes which he allowed himself for recreation?

"I thought I should catch you idle just at this moment," said the clergyman.

"Like enough, Muster Fenwick," said the miller; "I be idle at times, no doubt."

"It would be a bad life if you did not,—and a very short one too. It's hot walking, I can tell you, Mr. Brattle. If it goes on like this, I shall want a little idle time myself, I fear. Is Sam here?"

"No, Muster Fenwick, Sam is not here."

"Nor has been this morning, I suppose?"

"He's not here now, if you're wanting him."

This the old man said in a tone that seemed to signify some offence, or at least a readiness to take offence if more were said to him about his son. The clergyman did not sit down, but stood close over the father, looking down upon him; and the miller went on with his pipe, gazing into the clear blue sky.

"I do want him, Mr. Brattle." Then he stopped, and there was a pause. The miller puffed his pipe, but said not a word. "I do want him. I fear, Mr. Brattle, he's not coming to much good."

"Who said as he was? I never said so. The lad'd have been well enough if other folks would have let him be."

"I know what you mean, Mr. Brattle."

"I usually intend folks to know what I mean, Muster Fenwick. What's the good o' speaking else? If nobody hadn't a meddled with the lad, he'd been a good lad. But they did, and he ain't. That's all about it."

"You do me a great injustice, but I'm not going to argue that with you now. There would be no use in it. I've come to tell you I fear that Sam was at no good last night."

"That's like enough."

"I had better tell you the truth at once. He was about my place with two ruffians."

"And you wants to take him afore the magistrate?"

"I want nothing of the kind. I would make almost any sacrifice rather. I had him yesterday night by the collar of the coat, and I let him go free."

"If he couldn't shake himself free o' you, Muster Fenwick, without any letting in the matter, he ain't no son of mine."

"I was armed, and he couldn't. But what does that matter? What does matter is this;—that they who were with him were thoroughly bad fellows. Was he at home last night?"

"You'd better ax his mother, Muster Fenwick. The truth is, I don't care much to be talking of him at all. It's time I was in the mill, I believe. There's no one

much to help me now, barring the hired man." So saying, he got up and passed into the mill without making the slightest form of a salutation.

Mr. Fenwick paused for a minute, looking after the old man, and then went into the house. He knew very well that his treatment from the women would be very different to that which the miller had vouchsafed to him; but on that very account it would be difficult for him to make his communication. He had, however, known all this before he came. Old Brattle would, quite of course, be silent, suspicious, and uncivil. It had become the nature of the man to be so, and there was no help for it. But the two women would be glad to see him,—would accept his visit as a pleasure and a privilege; and on this account he found it to be very hard to say unpleasant words to them. But the unpleasant words must be spoken. Neither in duty nor in kindness could he know what he had learned last night, and be silent on this matter to the young man's family. He entered the house, and turned into the large kitchen or keeping-room on the left, in which the two women were almost always to be found. This was a spacious, square, low apartment, in which there was a long grate with various appurtenances for boiling, roasting, and baking. It was an old-fashioned apparatus, but Mrs. Brattle thought it to be infinitely more commodious than any of the newer-fangled ranges which from time to time she had been taken to see. Opposite to the fire-place there was a small piece of carpet, without which the stone floor would hardly have looked warm and comfortable. On the outer corner of this, half facing the fire, and half on one side of it, was an old oak arm-chair, made of oak throughout, but with a well-worn cushion on the seat of it, in which it was

the miller's custom to sit when the work of the day was done. In this chair no one else would ever sit, unless Sam would do so occasionally, in bravado, and as a protest against his father's authority. When he did so his mother would be wretched, and his sister lately had begged him to desist from the sacrilege. Close to this was a little round deal table, on which would be set the miller's single glass of gin and water, which would be made to last out the process of his evening smoking, and the candle, by the light of which, and with the aid of a huge pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, his wife would sit and darn her husband's stockings. She also had her own peculiar chair in this corner, but she had never accustomed herself to the luxury of arms to lean on, and had no cushion for her own comfort. There were various dressers, tables, and sideboards round the room, and a multiplicity of dishes, plates, and bowls, all standing in their proper places. But though the apartment was called a kitchen,—and, in truth, the cookery for the family was done here,—there was behind it, opening out to the rear, another kitchen in which there was a great boiler, and a huge oven never now used. The necessary but unsightly doings of kitchen life were here carried on, out of view. He, indeed, would have been fastidious who would have hesitated, on any score of cleanliness or niceness, to sit and eat at the long board on which the miller's dinner was daily served, or would have found it amiss to sit at that fire and listen to the ticking of the great mahogany-cased clock, which stood in the corner of the room. On the other side of the broad opening passage Mrs. Brattle had her parlour. Doubtless this parlour added something to the few joys of her life; though how it did so, or why she should

have rejoiced in it, it would be very difficult to say. She never entered it except for the purpose of cleaning and dusting. But it may be presumed that it was a glory to her to have a room carpeted, with six horsehair chairs, and a round table, and a horsehair sofa, and an old mirror over the fireplace, and a piece of worsted-work done by her daughter and framed like a picture, hanging up on one of the walls. But there must have come from it, we should say, more of regret than of pleasure; for when that room was first furnished, under her own auspices, and when those horsehair chairs were bought with a portion of her own modest dowry, doubtless she had intended that these luxuries should be used by her and hers. But they never had been so used. The day for using them had never come. Her husband never, by any chance, entered the apartment. To him probably, even in his youth, it had been a woman's gewgaw, useless, but allowable as tending to her happiness. Now the door was never even opened before his eye. His last interview with Carry had been in that room,—when he had laid his curse upon her, and bade her begone before his return, so that his decent threshold should be no longer polluted by her vileness.

On this side of the house there was a cross passage, dividing the front rooms from the back. At the end of this, looking to the front so as to have the parlour between it and the house-door, was the chamber in which slept Brattle and his wife. Here all those children had been born who had brought upon the household so many joys and so much sorrow. And behind, looking to the back on to the little plot of vegetables which was called the garden,—a plot in which it seemed that cabbages and gooseberry bushes were

made to alternate,—there was a large store-room, and the chamber in which Fanny slept,—now alone, but which she had once shared with four sisters. Carry was the last one that had left her; and now Fanny hardly dared to name the word sister above her breath. She could speak, indeed, of Sister Jay, the wife of the prosperous ironmonger at Warminster; but of sisters by their Christian names no mention was ever made.

Upstairs there were garrets, one of which was inhabited by Sam, when he chose to reside at home; and another by the red-armed country lass, who was maid-of-all-work at Brattle Mill. When it has also been told that below the cabbage-plot there was an orchard, stretching down to the junction of the waters, the description of Brattle Mill will have been made.

CHAPTER VII

THE MILLER'S WIFE

WHEN Mr. Fenwick entered the kitchen, Mrs. Brattle was sitting there alone. Her daughter was away, disposing of the remnants and utensils of the dinner-table. The old lady, with her spectacles on her nose, was sitting as usual with a stocking over her left arm. On the round table was a great open Bible, and, lying on the Bible, were sundry large worsted hose, which always seemed to Mr. Fenwick as though they must have undarned themselves as quickly as they were darned. Her Bible and her stockings furnished the whole of Mrs. Brattle's occupation from her dinner to her bed. In the morning, she would still occupy herself in matters of cookery, would peel potatoes, and prepare apples for puddings, and would look into the pot in which the cabbage was being boiled. But her stockings and her Bible shared together the afternoons of her week-days. On the Sundays there would only be the Bible, and then she would pass many hours of the day asleep. On every other Sunday morning she still walked to church and back,—going there always alone. There was no one now to accompany her. Her husband never went,—never had gone,—to church, and her son now had broken away from his good practices. On alternate mornings Fanny went, and also on every Sunday afternoon. Wet or dry, storm or sunshine, she always went; and her father, who was

an old Pagan, loved her for her zeal. Mrs. Brattle was a slight-made old woman, with hair almost white peering out modestly from under her clean cap, dressed always in a brown stuff gown that never came down below her ankle. Her features were still pretty, small, and débonnaire, and there was a sweetness in her eyes that no observer could overlook. She was a modest, pure, high-minded woman,—whom we will not call a lady, because of her position in life, and because she darned stockings in a kitchen. In all other respects she deserved the name.

“I heard your voice outside with the master,” she said, rising from her chair to answer the parson’s salutation, and putting down her stockings first, and then her spectacles upon the book, so that the Bible was completely hidden; “and I knew you would not go without saying a word to the old woman.”

“I believe I came mostly to see you to-day, Mrs. Brattle.”

“Did you then? It’s kind of you, I’m sure, Mr. Fenwick, this hot weather,—and you with so many folk to mind too. Will you take an apple, Mr. Fenwick? I don’t know that we’ve anything else to offer, but the quarantines are rare this year, they say;—though, no doubt, you have them better at the Vicarage?”

Fenwick took a large, red apple from the dresser, and began to munch it, declaring that they had none such in their orchard. And then, when the apple was finished, he had to begin his story.

“Mrs. Brattle, I’m sorry that I have something to say that will vex you.”

“Eh, Mr. Fenwick! Bad news? ’Deed and I think there’s but little good news left to us now,—little that

comes from the tongues of men. It's bad news that is always coming here. Mr. Fenwick,—what is it, sir?"

Then he repeated the question he had before put to the miller about Sam. Where was Sam last night?—She only shook her head. Did he sleep at home?—She shook her head again. Had he breakfasted at home?

"'Deed no, sir. I haven't set eyes on him since before yesterday."

"But how does he live? His father does not give him money, I suppose?"

"There's little enough to give him, Mr. Fenwick. When he is at the mill his father do pay him a some'at over and above his keep. It isn't much, sir. Young men must have a some'at in their pockets at times."

"He has too much in his pockets, I fear. I wish he had nothing, so that he needs must come home for his meals. He works at the mill, doesn't he?"

"At times, sir; and there isn't a lad in all Bullump-ton,"—for so the name was ordinarily pronounced,—
"who can do a turn of work to beat him."

"Do he and his father agree pretty well?"

"At times, sir. Times again his father don't say much to him. The master ain't given to much talking in the mill, and Sam, when he's there, works with a will. There's times when his father softens down to him, and then to see 'em, you'd think they was all in all to each other. There's a stroke of the master about Sam hisself, at times, Mr. Fenwick, and the old man's eyes gladden to see it. There's none so near his heart now as poor Sam."

"If he were as honest a man as his father, I could forgive all the rest," said Mr. Fenwick slowly, meaning

to imply that he was not there now to complain of church observances neglected, or of small irregularities of life. The paganism of the old miller had often been the subject of converse between the parson and Mrs. Brattle, it being a matter on which she had many an unhappy thought. He, groping darkly among subjects which he hardly dared to touch in her presence lest he should seem to unteach that in private which he taught in public, had subtilely striven to make her believe that though she, through her faith, would be saved, he, the husband, might yet escape that doom of everlasting fire, which to her was so stern a reality that she thought of its fury with a shudder whenever she heard of the world's wickedness. When Parson Fenwick had first made himself intimate at the mill Mrs. Brattle had thought that her husband's habits of life would have been to him as wormwood and gall,—that he would be unable not to chide, and well she knew that her husband would bear no chiding. By degrees she had come to understand that this new parson was one who talked more of life with its sorrows, and vices, and chances of happiness, and possibilities of goodness, than he did of the requirements of his religion. For herself inwardly she had grieved at this, and, possibly, also for him, but, doubtless, there had come to her some comfort, which she did not care to analyse, from the manner in which the "master," as she called him, Pagan as he was, had been treated by her clergyman. She wondered that it should be so, but yet it was a relief to her to know that God's messenger should come to her, and yet say never a word of his message to that hard lord, whom she so feared and so loved, and who was, as she well knew, too stubborn to receive it. And Fenwick had spoken,—still spoke to her, so

tenderly of her erring, fallen child, never calling her a castaway, talking of her as Carry, who might yet be worthy of happiness here and of all joy hereafter; that when she thought of him as a minister of God, whose duty it was to pronounce God's threats to erring human beings, she was almost alarmed. She could hardly understand his leniency,—his abstinence from reproof; but entertained a vague, wandering, unformed wish that, as he never opened the vials of his wrath on them, he would pour it out upon her,—on her who would bear it for their sake so meekly. If there was such a wish it was certainly doomed to disappointment. At this moment Fanny came in and curtsied as she gave her hand to the parson.

“Was Sam home last night, Fan?” asked the mother, in a sad, low voice.

“Yes, mother. He slept in his bed.”

“You are sure?” said the parson.

“Quite sure. I heard him this morning as he went out. It was about five. He spoke to me, and I answered him.”

“What did he say?”

“That he must go over to Lavington, and wouldn't be home till nightfall. I told him where he would find bread and cheese, and he took it.”

“But you didn't see him last night?”

“No, sir. He comes in at all hours, when he pleases. He was at dinner before yesterday, but I haven't seen him since. He didn't go nigh the mill after dinner that day.”

Then Mr. Fenwick considered how much he would tell to the mother and sister, and how much he would keep back. He did not in his heart believe that Sam Brattle had intended to enter his house and rob it; but

he did believe that the men with whom Sam was associated were thieves and housebreakers. If these men were prowling about Bullhampton it was certainly his duty to have them arrested if possible, and to prevent probable depredations, for his neighbours' sake as well as for his own. Nor would he be justified in neglecting this duty with the object of saving Sam Brattle. If only he could entice Sam away from them, into his own hands, under the power of his tongue,—there might probably be a chance.

“You think he'll be home to-night?” he asked.

“He said he would,” replied Fanny, who knew that she could not answer for her brother's word.

“If he does, bid him come to me. Make him come to me! Tell him that I will do him no harm. God knows how truly it is my object to do him good.”

“We are sure of that, sir,” said the mother.

“He need not be afraid that I will preach to him. I will only talk to him, as I would to a younger brother.”

“But what is it that he has done, sir?”

“He has done nothing that I know. There;—I will tell you the whole. I found him prowling about my garden at near midnight, yesterday. Had he been alone I should have thought nothing of it. He thinks he owes me a grudge for speaking to his father; and had I found him paying it by filling his pockets with fruit, I should only have told him that it would be better that he should come and take it in the morning.”

“But he wasn't—stealing?” asked the mother.

“He was doing nothing; neither were the men. But they were blackguards, and he was in bad hands. He could not have been in worse. I had a tussle with one of them, and I am sure the man was hurt. That,

however, has nothing to do with it. What I desire is to get a hold of Sam, so that he may be rescued from the hands of such companions. If you can make him come to me, do so."

Fanny promised, and so did the mother; but the promise was given in that tone which seemed to imply that nothing should be expected from its performance. Sam had long been deaf to the voices of the women of his family, and when his father's anger would be hot against him, he would simply go, and live where and how none of them knew. Among such men and women as the Brattles, parental authority must needs lie much lighter than it does with those who are wont to give much and to receive much. What obedience does the lad owe who at eighteen goes forth and earns his own bread? What is it to him that he has not yet reached man's estate? He has to do a man's work, and the price of it is his own, in his hands, when he has earned it. There is no curse upon the poor heavier than that which comes from the early breach of all ties of duty between fathers and their sons, and mothers and their daughters.

Mr. Fenwick, as he passed out of the miller's house, saw Jacob Brattle at the door of the mill. He was tugging along some load, pulling it in at the door, and prevailing against the weakness of his age by the force of his energy. The parson knew that the miller saw him, but the miller took no notice,—looked rather as though he did not wish to be observed,—and so the parson went on. When at home he postponed his account of what had taken place till he should be alone with his wife; but at night he told her the whole story.

"The long and the short of it is, Master Sam will

turn to house-breaking, if somebody doesn't get hold of him."

"To house-breaking, Frank?"

"I believe that he is about it."

"And were they going to break in here?"

"I don't think he was. I don't believe he was so minded then. But he had shown them the way in, and they were looking about on their own scores. Don't you frighten yourself. What with the constable and the life-preserver, we'll be safe. I've a big dog coming, a second Bone'm. Sam Brattle is in more danger, I fear, than the silver forks."

But, in spite of the cheeriness of his speech, the Vicar was anxious, and almost unhappy. After all that occurred in reference to himself and to Sam Brattle,—their former intimacies, the fish they had caught together, the rats they had killed together, the favour which he, the parson of the parish, had shown to this lad, and especially after the evil things which had been said of himself because of this friendship on his part for one so much younger than himself, and so much his inferior in rank,—it would be to him a most grievous misfortune should he be called upon to acknowledge publicly Sam Brattle's iniquity, and more grievous still, if the necessity should be forced upon him of bringing Sam to open punishment. Fenwick knew well that diverse accusations had been made against him in the parish regarding Sam. The Marquis of Trowbridge had said a word. Mr. Puddleham had said many words. The old miller himself had growled. Even Gilmore had expressed disapprobation. The Vicar, in his pride, had turned a deaf ear to them all. He began to fear now that possibly he had been wrong in the favours shown to Sam Brattle.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST DAY

THE parson's visit to the mill was on a Saturday. The next Sunday passed by very quietly, and nothing was seen of Mr. Gilmore at the Vicarage. He was at church, and walked with the two ladies from the porch to their garden gate, but he declined Mrs. Fenwick's invitation to lunch, and was not seen again on that day. The parson had sent word to Fanny Brattle during the service to stop a few minutes for him, and had learned from her that Sam had not been at home last night. He had also learned, before the service that morning, that very early on the Saturday, probably about four o'clock, two men had passed through Paul's Hinton with a huxter's cart and a pony. Now Paul's Hinton, or Hinton Saint Paul's, as it should be properly called, was a long straggling village, six miles from Bullhampton, and half-way on the road to Market Lavington, to which latter place Sam had told his sister that he was going. Putting these things together, Mr. Fenwick did not in the least doubt but the two men in the cart were they who had been introduced to his garden by young Brattle.

"I only hope," said the parson, "that there's a good surgeon at Market Lavington. One of the gentlemen in that cart must have wanted him, I take it." Then he thought that it might, perhaps, be worth his while to trot over to Lavington in the course of the week, and make inquiries.

On the Wednesday Mary Lowther was to go back

to Loring. This seemed like a partial break-up of their establishment, both to the parson and his wife. Fenwick had made up his mind that Mary was to be his nearest neighbour for life, and had fallen into the way of treating her accordingly, telling her of things in the parish as he might have done to the Squire's wife, presuming the Squire's wife to have been on the best possible terms with him. He now regarded Mary as being almost an impostor. She had taken him in and obtained his confidence under false pretences. It was true that she might still come and fill the place that he had appointed for her. He rather thought that at last she would do so. But he was angry with her because she hesitated. She was creating an unnecessary disturbance among them. She had, he thought, been now wooed long enough, and, as he told his wife more than once, was making an ass of herself. Mrs. Fenwick was not quite so hard in her judgment, but she also was tempted to be a little angry. She loved her friend Mary a great deal better than she loved Mr. Gilmore, but she was thoroughly convinced that Mary could not do better than accept a man whom she owned that she liked,—whom she, at any rate, liked so well that she had not as yet rejected him. Therefore, although Mary was going, they were, both of them, rather savage with her.

The Monday passed by, also very quietly, and Mr. Gilmore did not come to them, but he had sent a note to tell them that he would walk down on the Tuesday evening to say good-bye to Miss Lowther. Early on the Wednesday Mr. Fenwick was to drive her to Westbury, whence the railway would take her round by Chippenham and Swindon to Loring. On the Tuesday morning she was very melancholy. Though she knew

that it was right to go away, she greatly regretted that it was necessary. She was angry with herself for not having better known her own mind, and though she was quite sure that were Mr. Gilmore to repeat his offer to her that moment, she would not accept it, nevertheless she thought ill of herself because she would not do so. "I do believe," she said to herself, "that I shall never like any man better." She knew well enough that if she was never brought to love any man, she never ought to marry any man; but she was not quite sure whether Janet was not right in telling her that she had formed erroneous notions of the sort of love she ought to feel for the man whom she should resolve to accept. Perhaps it was true that that kind of adoration which Janet entertained for her husband was a feeling which came after marriage—a feeling which would spring up in her own heart as soon as she was the man's own wife, the mistress of his house, the mother of his children, the one human being for whose welfare he was solicitous beyond that of all others. And this man did love her. She had no doubt about that. And she was unhappy, too, because she felt that she had offended his friends, and that they thought that she was not treating their friend well.

"Janet," she said, as they were again sitting out on the lawn, on that Tuesday afternoon, "I am almost sorry that I came here at all."

"Don't say that, dear."

"I have spent some of the happiest days of my life here, but the visit, on the whole, has been unfortunate. I am going away in disgrace. I feel that so acutely."

"What nonsense! How are you in disgrace?"

"Mr. Fenwick and you think that I have behaved

badly. I know you do, and I feel it so strongly! I think so much of him, and believe him to be so good, and so wise, and so understanding,—he knows what people should do, and should be, so well,—that I cannot doubt that I have been wrong if he thinks so.”

“He only wishes that you could have made up your mind to marry a most worthy man, who is his friend, and who, by marrying you, would have fixed you close to us. He wishes it still, and so do I.”

“But he thinks that I have been—have been mopish, and lack-a-daisical, and—and—almost untrue. I can hear it in the tone of his voice, and see it in his eye. I can tell it from the way he shakes hands with me in the morning. He is such a true man that I know in a moment what he means at all times. I am going away under his displeasure, and I wish I had never come.”

“Return as Mrs. Gilmore, and all his displeasure will disappear.”

“Yes, because he would forgive me. He would say to himself that, as I had repented, I might be taken back to his grace; but as things are at present he condemns me. And so do you.”

“If you ask me, Mary, I must tell the truth. I don’t think you know your own mind.”

“Suppose I don’t, is that disgraceful?”

“But there comes a time when a girl should know her own mind. You are giving this poor fellow an enormous deal of unnecessary trouble.”

“I have known my own mind so far as to tell him that I could not marry him.”

“As far as I understand, Mary, you have always told him to wait a little longer.”

“I have never asked him to wait, Janet;—never. It

is he who says that he will wait; and what can I answer when he says so? All the same I don't mean to defend myself. I do believe that I have been wrong, and I wish that I had never come here. It sounds ungrateful, but I do. It is so dreadful to feel that I have incurred the displeasure of people that I love so dearly."

"There is no displeasure, Mary; the word is a good deal too strong. I wonder what you'll think of all this when the parson and his wife come up on future Sundays to dine with the Squire and his lady. I have long since made up my mind that when afternoon service is over, we ought to go up and be made much of at the Privets; and you're putting all this off till I'm an old woman—for a chimera. It's about our Sunday dinners that I'm angry. Flo, my darling, what a face you have got. Do come and sit still for a few minutes, or you'll be in a fever." While Mrs. Fenwick was wiping her girl's brow, and smoothing her ringlets, Mary walked off to the orchard by herself. There was a broad green path which made the circuit of it, and she took the round twice, pausing at the bottom to look at the spot from which she had tumbled into the river. What a trouble she had been to them all! She was thoroughly dissatisfied with herself; especially so because she had fallen into those very difficulties which from early years she had resolved that she would avoid. She had made up her mind that she would not flirt, that she would never give a right to any man—or to any woman—to call her a coquette; that if love and a husband came in her way she would take them thankfully, and that if they did not, she would go on her path quietly, if possible, feeling no uneasiness, and certainly showing none, because the joys of a married

life did not belong to her. But now she had gotten herself into a mess, and she could not tell herself that it was not her own fault. Then she resolved again that in future she would go right. It could not but be that a woman could keep herself from floundering in these messes of half-courtship,—of courtship on one side, and doubt on the other,—if she would persistently adhere to some safe rule. Her rejection of Mr. Gilmore ought to have been unhesitating and certain from the first. She was sure of that now. She had been guilty of an absurdity in supposing that because the man had been in earnest, therefore she had been justified in keeping him in suspense, for his own sake. She had been guilty of an absurdity, and also of great self-conceit. She could do nothing now but wait till she should hear from him,—and then answer him steadily. After what had passed she could not go to him and declare that it was all over. He was coming to-night, and she was nearly sure that he would not say a word to her on the subject. If he did,—if he renewed his offer,—then she would speak out. It was hardly possible that he should do so, and therefore the trouble which she had created must remain.

As she thus resolved, she was leaning over the gate looking into the churchyard, not much observing the graves or the monuments or the beautiful old ivy-covered tower, or thinking of the dead that were lying there, or of the living who prayed there; but swearing to herself that for the rest of her life she would keep clear of, what she called, girlish messes. Like other young ladies she had read much poetry and many novels; but her sympathies had never been with young ladies who could not go straight through with their love affairs, from the beginning to the end, without flirtation

of either an inward or an outward nature. Of all her heroines, Rosalind was the one she liked the best, because from the first moment of her passion she knew herself and what she was about, and loved her lover right heartily. Of all girls in prose or poetry she declared that Rosalind was the least of a flirt. She meant to have the man, and never had a doubt about it. But with such a one as Flora MacIvor she had no patience;—a girl who did and who didn't, who would and who wouldn't, who could and who couldn't, and who of all flirts was to her the most nauseous! As she was taking herself to task, accusing herself of being a Flora, without the poetry and romance to excuse her, Mr. Fenwick came round from Farmer Trumbull's side of the church, and got over the stile into the churchyard.

"What, Mary, is that you gazing in so intently among your brethren that were?"

"I was not thinking of them," she said, with a smile. "My mind was intent on some of my brethren that are." Then there came a thought across her, and she made a sudden decision. "Mr. Fenwick," she said, "would you mind walking up and down the churchyard with me once or twice? I have something to say to you, and I can say it now so well." He opened the gate for her, and she joined him. "I want to beg your pardon, and to get you to forgive me. I know you have been angry with me."

"Hardly angry,—but vexed. As you ask me so frankly and prettily, I will forgive you. There is my hand upon it. All evil thoughts against you shall go out of my head. I shall still have my wishes, but I will not be cross with you."

"You are so good, and so clearly honest. I de-

clare I think Janet the happiest woman that I ever heard of."

"Come, come; I didn't bargain for this kind of thing when I allowed myself to be brought in here."

"But it is so. I did not stop you for that, however, but to acknowledge that I have been wrong, and to ask you to pardon me."

"I will. I do. If there has been anything amiss, it shall not be looked on again as amiss. But there has been only one thing amiss."

"And Mr. Fenwick, will you do this for me? Will you tell him that I was foolish to say that he might wait? Why should he wait? Of course he should not wait. When I am gone, tell him so, and beg him to make an end of it. I had not thought of it properly, or I would not have allowed him to be tormented."

There was a pause after this, during which they walked half the length of the path in silence. "No, Mary," he said, after a while; "I will not tell him that."

"Why not, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Because it will not be for his good, or for mine, or for Janet's, or, as I believe, for yours."

"Indeed, it will, for the good of us all."

"I think, Mary, you do not quite understand. There is not one among us who does not wish that you should come here and be one of us; a real, right down Bullompton 'ooman, as they say in the village. I want you to be my wife's dearest friend, and my own nearest neighbour. There is no man in the world whom I love as I do Harry Gilmore, and I want you to be his wife. I have said to myself and to Janet a score of times that you certainly would be so sooner or later. My wrath has not come from your bidding him to

wait, but from your coldness in not taking him without waiting. You should remember that we grow grey very quickly, Mary."

Here was the old story again,—the old story as she had heard it from Harry Gilmore, but told as she had never expected to hear it from the lips of Frank Fenwick. It amounted to this; that even he, Frank Fenwick, bade her wait and try. But she had formed her resolution, and she was not going to be turned aside, even by Frank Fenwick; "I had thought that you would help me," she said, very slowly.

"So I will, with all my heart, towards the keys of the store closets of the Privets, but not a step the other way. It has to be, Mary. He is too much in earnest, and too good, and too fit for the place to which he aspires, to miss his object. Come, we'll go in. Mind, you and I are one again, let it go how it may. I will own that I have been vexed for the last two days,—have been in a humour unbecoming your departure to-morrow. I throw all that behind me. You and I are dear friends,—are we not?"

"I do hope so, Mr. Fenwick?"

"There shall be no feather moulted between us. But as to operating between you and Harry, with the view of keeping you apart, I decline the commission. It is my assured belief that sooner or later he will be your husband. Now we will go up to Janet, who will begin to think herself a Penelope, if we desert her much longer."

Immediately after this Mary went up to dress for dinner. Should she make up her mind to give way, and put on the blue ribbons which he loved so well? She thought that she could tell him at once, if she made up her mind in that direction. It would not, perhaps,

be very maidenly, but anything would be better than suspense,—than torment to him. Then she took out her blue ribbons, and tried to go through that ceremony of telling him. It was quite impossible. Were she to do so, she would know no happiness again in this world, or probably in the other. To do the thing, it would be necessary that she should lie to him.

She came down in a simple white dress, without any ribbons, in just the dress which she would have worn had Mr. Gilmore not been coming. At dinner they were very merry. The word of command had gone forth from Frank that Mary was to be forgiven, and Janet of course obeyed. The usual courtesies of society demand that there shall be civility—almost flattering civility—from host to guest, and from guest to host; and yet how often does it occur that in the midst of these courtesies there is something that tells of hatred, of ridicule, or of scorn! How often does it happen that the guest knows that he is disliked, or the host knows that he is a bore! In the last two days Mary had felt that she was not cordially a welcome guest. She had felt also that the reason was one against which she could not contend. Now all that, at least, was over. Frank Fenwick's manner had never been pleasanter to her than it was on this occasion, and Janet followed the suit which her lord led.

They were again on the lawn between eight and nine o'clock when Harry Gilmore came up to them. He was gracious enough in his salutation to Mary Lowther, but no indifferent person would have thought that he was her lover. He talked chiefly to Fenwick, and when they went in to tea did not take a place on the sofa beside Mary. But after a while he said something which told them all of his love.

"What do you think I've been doing to-day, Frank?"

"Getting your wheat down, I should hope."

"We begin that to-morrow. I never like to be quite the earliest at that work, or yet the latest."

"Better be a day too early than a day too late, Harry."

"Never mind about that. I've been down with old Brattle."

"And what have you been doing with him?"

"I'm half ashamed, and yet I fancy I'm right."

As he said this he looked across to Mary Lowther, who no doubt was watching every turn of his face from the corner of her eye. "I've just been and knocked under, and told him that the old place shall be put to rights."

"That's your doing, Mary," said Mrs. Fenwick, injudiciously.

"Oh, no; I'm sure it is not. Mr. Gilmore would only do such a thing as that because it is proper."

"I don't know about it's being proper," said he. "I'm not quite sure whether it is or not. I shall never get any interest for my money."

"Interest for one's money is not everything," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"Nevertheless, when one builds houses for other people to live in, one has to look to it," said the parson.

"People say it's the prettiest spot in the parish," continued Mr. Gilmore, "and as such it shouldn't be let go to ruin." Janet remarked afterwards to her husband that Mary Lowther had certainly declared that it was the prettiest spot in the parish, but that, as far as her knowledge went, nobody else had ever said so. "And then, you see, when I refused to spend money

upon it, old Brattle had money of his own, and it was his business to do it."

"He hasn't much now, I fear," said Mr. Fenwick.

"I fear not. His family has been very heavy on him. He paid money to put two of his boys into trade who died afterwards, and then for years he had either doctors or undertakers about the place. So I just went down to him and told him I would do it."

"And how did he take it?"

"Like a bear, as he is. He would hardly speak to me, but went away into the mill, telling me that I might settle it all with his wife. It's going to be done, however. I shall have the estimate next week, and I suppose it will cost me two or three hundred pounds. The mill is worse than the house, I take it."

"I am so glad it is to be done," said Mary. After that Mr. Gilmore did not in the least begrudge his two or three hundred pounds. But he said not a word to Mary, just pressed her hand at parting, and left her subject to a possibility of a reversal of her sentence at the end of the stated period.

On the next morning Mr. Fenwick drove her in his little open phaeton to the station at Westbury. "You are to come back to us, you know," said Mrs. Fenwick, "and remember how anxiously I am waiting for my Sunday dinners."

Mary said not a word, but as she was driven round in front of the church she looked up at the dear old tower, telling herself that, in all probability, she would never see it again.

"I have just one thing to say, Mary," said the parson, as he walked up and down the platform with her at Westbury; "you are to remember that, whatever happens, there is always a home for you at Bullhampton."

when you choose to come to it. I am not speaking of the Privets now, but of the Vicarage."

"How very good you are to me!"

"And so are you to us. Dear friends should be good to each other. God bless you, dear." From thence she made her way home to Loring by herself.

CHAPTER IX

MISS MARRABLE

WHATEVER may be the fact as to the rank and proper calling of Bullhampton, there can be no doubt that Loring is a town. There is a market-place, and a High Street, and a Board of Health, and a Paragon Crescent, and a town Hall, and two different parish churches, one called St. Peter Lowtown, and the other St. Botolph's Uphill, and there are Uphill Street, and Lowtown Street, and various other streets. I never heard of a mayor of Loring, but, nevertheless, there is no doubt as to its being a town. Nor did it ever return members to Parliament; but there was once, in one of the numerous bills that have been proposed, an idea of grouping it with Cirencester and Lechlade. All the world of course knows that this was never done; but the transient rumour of it gave the Loringites an improved position, and justified that little joke about a live dog being better than a dead lion, with which the parson at Bullhampton regaled Miss Lowther at the time.

All the fashion of Loring dwelt, as a matter of course, at Uphill. Lowtown was vulgar, dirty, devoted to commercial and manufacturing purposes, and hardly owned a single genteel private house. There was the parsonage, indeed, which stood apart from its neighbours, inside great tall slate-coloured gates, and which had a garden of its own. But except the clergyman, who had no choice in the matter, nobody who was any-

body lived at Lowtown. There were three or four factories there,—in and out of which troops of girls would be seen passing twice a day, in their ragged, soiled, dirty mill dresses, all of whom would come out on Sunday dressed with a magnificence that would lead one to suppose that trade at Loring was doing very well. Whether trade did well or ill, whether wages were high or low, whether provisions were cheap in price, whether there were peace or war between capital and labour, still there was the Sunday magnificence. What a blessed thing it is for women—and for men too certainly—that there should be a positive happiness to the female sex in the possession, and in exhibiting the possession, of bright clothing! It is almost as good for the softening of manners, and the not permitting of them to be ferocious, as is the faithful study of the polite arts. At Loring the manners of the mill hands, as they were called, were upon the whole good,—which I believe was in a great degree to be attributed to their Sunday magnificence.

The real West-end of Loring was understood by all men to lie in Paragon Crescent, at the back of St. Botolph's Church. The whole of this Crescent was built, now some twenty years ago, by Mrs. Fenwick's father, who had been clever enough to see that as mills were made to grow in the low town, houses for wealthy people to live in ought to be made to grow in the high town. He therefore built the Paragon, and a certain small row of very pretty houses near the end of the Paragon, called Balfour Place,—and had done very well, and had made money; and now lay asleep in the vaults below St. Botolph's Church. No inconsiderable proportion of the comfort of Bullhampton parsonage is due to Mr. Balfour's success in that

achievement of Paragon Crescent. There were none of the family left at Loring. The widow had gone away to live at Torquay with a sister, and the only other child, another daughter, was married to that distinguished barrister on the Oxford circuit, Mr. Quickenham. Mr. Quickenham and our friend the parson were very good friends; but they did not see a great deal of each other, Mr. Fenwick not going up very often to London, and Mr. Quickenham being unable to use the Vicarage of Bullhampton when on his own circuit. As for the two sisters, they had very strong ideas about their husbands' professions; Sophia Quickenham never hesitating to declare that one was life, and the other stagnation; and Janet Fenwick protesting that the difference to her seemed to be almost that between good and evil. They wrote to each other perhaps once a quarter. But the Balfour family was in truth broken up.

Miss Marrable, Mary Lowther's aunt, lived, of course, at Uphill; but not in the Crescent, nor yet in Balfour Place. She was an old lady with very modest means, whose brother had been rector down at St. Peter's, and she had passed the greatest part of her life within those slate-coloured gates. When he died, and when she, almost exactly at the same time, found that it would be expedient that she should take charge of her niece, Mary, she removed herself up to a small house in Botolph Lane, in which she could live decently on her £300 a year. It must not be surmised that Botolph Lane was a squalid place, vile, or dirty, or even unfashionable. It was narrow and old, having been inhabited by recent people long before the Crescent, or even Mr. Balfour himself, had been in existence; but it was narrow and old, and the rents were cheap, and

here Miss Marrable was able to live, and occasionally to give tea-parties, and to provide a comfortable home for her niece, within the limits of her income. Miss Marrable was herself a lady of very good family, the late Sir Gregory Marrable having been her uncle; but her only sister had married a Captain Lowther, whose mother had been first cousin to the Earl of Periwinkle; and therefore on her own account, as well as on that of her niece, Miss Marrable thought a good deal about blood. She was one of those ladies,—now few in number,—who within their heart of hearts conceive that money gives no title to social distinction, let the amount of money be ever so great, and its source ever so stainless. Rank to her was a thing quite assured and ascertained, and she had no more doubt as to her own right to pass out of a room before the wife of a millionaire than she had of the right of a millionaire to spend his own guineas. She always addressed an attorney by letter as Mister, raising up her eyebrows when appealed to on the matter, and explaining that an attorney is not an esquire. She had an idea that the son of a gentleman, if he intended to maintain his rank as a gentleman, should earn his income as a clergyman, or as a barrister, or as a soldier, or as a sailor. Those were the professions intended for gentlemen. She would not absolutely say that a physician was not a gentleman, or even a surgeon; but she would never allow to physic the same absolute privileges which, in her eyes, belonged to law and the church. There might also possibly be a doubt about the Civil Service and Civil Engineering; but she had no doubt whatever that when a man touched trade or commerce in any way he was doing that which was not the work of a gentleman. He might be very respectable, and it

might be very necessary that he should do it; but brewers, bankers, and merchants were not gentlemen, and the world, according to Miss Marrable's theory, was going astray, because people were forgetting their landmarks.

As to Miss Marrable herself nobody could doubt that she was a lady; she looked it in every inch. There were not, indeed, many inches of her, for she was one of the smallest, daintiest, little old women that ever were seen. But now, at seventy, she was very pretty, quite a woman to look at with pleasure. Her feet and hands were exquisitely made, and she was very proud of them. She wore her own grey hair, of which she showed very little, but that little was always exquisitely nice. Her caps were the perfection of caps. Her green eyes were bright and sharp, and seemed to say that she knew very well how to take care of herself. Her mouth, and nose, and chin were all well formed, small, shapely, and concise, not straggling about her face as do the mouths, noses, and chins of some old ladies—ay, and of some young ladies also. Had it not been that she had lost her teeth, she would hardly have looked to be an old woman. Her health was perfect. She herself would say that she had never yet known a day's illness. She dressed with the greatest care, always wearing silk at and after luncheon. She dressed three times a day, and in the morning would come down in what she called a merino gown. But then, with her, clothes never seemed to wear out. Her motions were so slight and delicate, that the gloss of her dresses would remain on them when the gowns of other women would almost have been worn to rags. She was never seen of an afternoon or evening without gloves, and her gloves were always clean and apparently new. She

went to church once on Sundays in winter, and twice in summer, and she had a certain very short period of each day devoted to Bible reading; but at Loring she was not reckoned to be among the religious people. Indeed, there were those who said that she was very worldly-minded, and that at her time of life she ought to devote herself to other books than those which were daily in her hands. Pope, Dryden, Swift, Cowley, Fielding, Richardson, and Goldsmith, were her authors. She read the new novels as they came out, but always with critical comparisons that were hostile to them. Fielding, she said, described life as it was; whereas Dickens had manufactured a kind of life that never had existed, and never could exist. The pathos of *Esmond* was very well, but *Lady Castlemaine* was nothing to *Clarissa Harlowe*. As for poetry, Tennyson, she said, was all sugar-candy; he had neither the common sense, nor the wit, nor, as she declared, to her ear the melody of Pope. All the poets of the present century, she declared, if put together, could not have written the *Rape of the 'Lock*. Pretty as she was, and small, and nice, and lady-like, I think she liked her literature rather strong. It is certain that she had Smollett's novels in a cupboard up-stairs, and it was said that she had been found reading one of Wycherley's plays.

The strongest point in her character was her contempt of money. Not that she had any objection to it, or would at all have turned up her nose at another hundred a year had anybody left to her such an accession of income; but that in real truth she never measured herself by what she possessed, or others by what they possessed. She was as grand a lady to herself, eating her little bit of cold mutton, or dining off a tiny sole, as though she sat at the finest banquet that

could be spread. She had no fear of economies, either before her two handmaids or anybody else in the world. She was fond of her tea, and in summer could have cream for twopence; but when cream became dear, she saved money and had a pen'orth of milk. She drank two glasses of Marsela every day, and let it be clearly understood that she couldn't afford sherry. But when she gave a tea-party, as she did, perhaps, six or seven times a year, sherry was always handed round with cake before the people went away. There were matters in which she^was extravagant. When she went out herself she never took one of the common street flies, but paid eighteen pence extra to get a brougham from the Dragon. And when Mary Lowther,—who had only fifty pounds a year of her own, with which she clothed herself and provided herself with pocket-money,—was going to Bullhampton, Miss Marrable actually proposed to her to take one of the maids with her. Mary, of course, would not hear of it, and said that she should just as soon think of taking the house; but Miss Marrable had thought that it would, perhaps, not be well for a girl so well-born as Miss Lowther to go out visiting without a maid. She herself very rarely left Loring, because she could not afford it; but when, two summers back, she did go to Weston-super-Mare for a fortnight, she took one of the girls with her.

Miss Marrable had heard a great deal about Mr. Gilmore. Mary, indeed, was not inclined to keep secrets from her aunt, and her very long absence,—so much longer than had at first been intended,—could hardly have been sanctioned unless some reason had been given. There had been many letters on the subject, not only between Mary and her aunt, but between Mrs. Fenwick and her very old friend Miss Marrable.

Of course these latter letters had spoken loudly the praises of Mr. Gilmore, and Miss Marrable had become quite one of the Gilmore faction. She desired that her niece should marry; but that she should marry a gentleman. She would have infinitely preferred to see Mary an old maid, than to hear that she was going to give herself to any suitor contaminated by trade. Now Mr. Gilmore's position was exactly that which Miss Marrable regarded as being the best in England. He was a country gentleman, living on his own acres, a justice of the peace, whose father and grandfather and great-grandfather had occupied exactly the same position. Such a marriage for Mary would be quite safe; and in those days one did hear so often of girls making, she would not say improper marriages, but marriages which in her eyes were not fitting! Mr. Gilmore, she thought, exactly filled that position which entitled a gentleman to propose marriage to such a lady as Mary Lowther.

"Yes, my dear, I am glad to have you back again. Of course I have been a little lonely, but I bear that kind of thing better than most people. Thank God, my eyes are good."

"You are looking so well, Aunt Sarah!"

"I am well. I don't know how other women get so much amiss; but God has been very good to me."

"And so pretty," said Mary, kissing her.

"My dear, it's a pity you're not a young gentleman."

"You are so fresh and nice, aunt. I wish I could always look as you do."

"What would Mr. Gilmore say?"

"Oh, Mr. Gilmore, Mr. Gilmore, Mr. Gilmore! I am so weary of Mr. Gilmore."

“Weary of him, Mary?”

“Weary of myself because of him,—that is what I mean. He has behaved always well, and I am not at all sure that I have. And he is a perfect gentleman. But I shall never be Mrs. Gilmore, Aunt Sarah.”

“Janet says that she thinks you will.”

“Janet is mistaken. But, dear aunt, don’t let us talk about it at once. Of course you shall hear everything in time, but I have had so much of it. Let us see what new books there are. Cast Iron! You don’t mean to say you have come to that?”

“I shan’t read it.”

“But I will, aunt. So it must not go back for a day or two. I do love the Fenwicks, dearly, dearly, both of them. They are almost, if not quite, perfect. And yet I am glad to be at home.”

CHAPTER X

CRUNCH'EM CAN'T BE HAD

MR. FENWICK had intended to have come home round by Market Lavington, after having deposited Miss Lowther at the Westbury Station, with the view of making some inquiry respecting the gentleman with the hurt shoulder; but he had found the distance to be too great, and had abandoned the idea. After that there was not a day to spare till the middle of the next week; so that it was nearly a fortnight after the little scene at the corner of the Vicarage garden wall before he called upon the Lavington constable and the Lavington doctor. From the latter he could learn nothing. No such patient had been to him. But the constable, though he had not seen the two men, had heard of them. One was a man who in former days had frequented Lavington, Burrows by name, generally known as Jack the Grinder, who had been in every prison in Wiltshire and Somersetshire, but who had not,—so said the constable,—honoured Lavington for the last two years, till this his last appearance. He had, however, been seen there in company with another man, and had evidently been in a condition very unfit for work. He had slept one night at a low public-house, and had then moved on. The man had complained of a fall from the cart, and had declared that he was black and blue all over; but it seemed to be clear that he had no broken bones. Mr. Fenwick therefore was all but convinced that Jack the Grinder

was the gentleman with whom he had had the encounter, and that the grinder's back had withstood that swinging blow from the life-preserver. Of the Grinder's companions nothing could be learned. The two men had taken the Devizes road out of Lavington, and beyond that nothing was known of them. When the parson mentioned Sam Brattle's name in a whisper, the Lavington constable shook his head. He knew all about old Jacob Brattle. A very respectable party was old Mr. Brattle in the constable's opinion. Nevertheless the constable shook his head when Sam Brattle's name was mentioned. Having learned so much, the parson rode home.

Two days after this, on a Friday, Fenwick was sitting after breakfast in his study, at work on his sermon for next Sunday, when he was told that old Mrs. Brattle was waiting to see him. He immediately got up, and found his own wife and the miller's seated in the hall. It was not often that Mrs. Brattle made her way to the Vicarage, but when she did so she was treated with great consideration. It was still August, and the weather was very hot, and she had walked up across the water mead, and was tired. A glass of wine and a biscuit were pressed upon her, and she was encouraged to sit and say a few indifferent words, before she was taken into the study and told to commence the story which had brought her so far. And there was a most inviting topic for conversation. The mill and the mill premises were to be put in order by the landlord. Mrs. Brattle affected to be rather dismayed than otherwise by the coming operations. The mill would have lasted their time, she thought, "and as for them as were to come after them,—well! she didn't know. As things was now, perhaps, it might be that

after all Sam would have the mill." But the trouble occasioned by the workmen would be infinite. How were they to live in the mean time, and where were they to go? It soon appeared, however, that all this had been already arranged. Milling must of course be stopped for a month or six weeks. "Indeed, sir, feyther says that there won't be no more grinding much before winter." But the mill was to be repaired first, and then, when it became absolutely necessary to dismantle the house, they were to endeavour to make shift, and live in the big room of the mill itself, till their furniture should be put back again. Mrs. Fenwick, with ready good nature, offered to accommodate Mrs. Brattle and Fanny at the Vicarage; but the old woman declined with many protestations of gratitude. She had never left her old man yet, and would not do so now. The weather would be mild for awhile, and she thought that they could get through. By this time the glass of wine had been sipped to the bottom, and the parson, mindful of his sermon, had led the visitor into his study. She had come to tell that Sam at last had returned home.

"Why didn't you bring him up with you, Mrs. Brattle?"

Here was a question to ask of an old lady, whose dominion over her son was absolutely none! Sam had become so frightfully independent that he hardly regarded the word of his father, who was a man pre-eminently capable of maintaining authority, and would no more do a thing because his mother told him than because the wind whistled.

"I axed him to come up, not just with me, but of hisself, Mr. Fenwick; but he said as how you would know where to find him if you wanted him."

"That's just what I don't know. However, if he's there now I'll go to him. It would have been better far that he should have come to me."

"I told 'un so, Mr. Fenwick, I did, indeed."

"It does not signify. I will go to him; only it cannot be to-day, as I have promised to take my wife over to Charlicoats. But I'll come down immediately after breakfast to-morrow. You think he'll be still there?"

"I be sure he will, Mr. Fenwick. He and feyther have taken on again, till it's beautiful to see. There was none of 'em feyther ever loved like he,—only one." Thereupon the poor woman burst out into tears, and covered her face with her handkerchief. "He never makes half so much account of my Fan, that never had a fault belonging to her."

"If Sam will stick to that it will be well for him."

"He's taken up extraordinary with the repairs, Mr. Fenwick. He's in and about and over the place, looking to everything; and feyther says he knows so much about it, he b'lieves the boy could do it all out o' his own head. There's nothing feyther ever liked so much as folks to be strong and clever."

"Perhaps the Squire's tradesmen won't like all that. Is Mitchell going to do it?"

"It ain't a doing in that way, Mr. Fenwick. The Squire is allowing £200, and feyther is to get it done. Mister Mitchell is to see that it's done proper, no doubt."

"And now tell me, Mrs. Brattle, what has Sam been about all the time that he was away?"

"That's just what I cannot tell you, Mr. Fenwick."

"Your husband has asked him, I suppose?"

"If he has, he ain't told me, Mr. Fenwick. I don't care to come 'atween them with hints and jealousies, suspecting like. Our Fan says he's been out working somewhere Lavington way; but I don't know as she knows."

"Was he decent looking when he came home?"

"He wasn't much amiss, Mr. Fenwick. He has that way with him that he most always looks decent;—don't he, sir?"

"Had he any money?"

"He had a some'at, because when he was working, moving the big lumber as though for bare life, he sent one of the boys for beer, and I see'd him give the boy the money."

"I'm sorry for it. I wish he'd come back without a penny, and with hunger like a wolf in his stomach, and with his clothes all rags, so that he might have had a taste of the suffering of a vagabond's life."

"Just like the Prodigal Son, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Just like the Prodigal Son. He would not have come back to his father had he not been driven by his own vices to live with the swine." Then, seeing the tears coming down the poor mother's cheeks, he added in a kinder voice, "Perhaps it may be all well as it is. We will hope so at least, and to-morrow I will come down and see him. You need not tell him that I am coming, unless he should ask where you have been."

Then Mrs. Brattle took her leave, and the parson finished his sermon.

That afternoon he drove his wife across the county to visit certain friends at Charlicoats, and, both going and coming, could not keep himself from talking about the Brattles. In the first place, he thought that

Gilmore was wrong not to complete the work himself. "Of course he'll see that the money is spent and all that, and no doubt in this way he may get the job done twenty or thirty pounds cheaper; but the Brattles have not interest enough in the place to justify it."

"I suppose the old man liked it best so."

"The old man shouldn't have been allowed to have his way. I am in an awful state of alarm about Sam. Much as I like him,—or at any rate did like him,—I fear he is going, or perhaps has gone, to the dogs. That those two men were housebreakers is as certain as that you sit there; and I cannot doubt but that he has been with them over at Lavington or Devizes, or somewhat in that country."

"But he may, perhaps, never have joined them in anything of that kind."

"A man is known by his companions. I would not have believed it if I had not found him with the men, and traced him and them about the county together. You see that this fellow whom they call the Grinder was certainly the man I struck. I tracked him to Lavington, and there he was complaining of being sore all over his body. I don't wonder that he was sore. He must be made like a horse to be no worse than sore. Well, then, that man and Sam were certainly in our garden together."

"Give him a chance, Frank."

"Of course, I will give him a chance. I will give him the very best chance I can. I would do anything to save him,—but I can't help knowing what I know."

He had made very little to his wife of the danger of the Vicarage being robbed, but he could not but feel that there was danger. His wife had brought with

her, among other plenishing for their household, a considerable amount of handsome plate, more than is, perhaps, generally to be found in country parsonages, and no doubt this fact was known, at any rate, to Sam Brattle. Had the men simply intended to rob the garden, they would not have run the risk of coming so near to the house windows. But then it certainly was true that Sam was not showing them the way. The parson did not quite know what to think about it, but it was clearly his duty to be on his guard.

That same evening he sauntered across the corner of the churchyard to his neighbour the farmer. Looking out warily for Bone'm, he stood leaning upon the farm gate. Bone'm was not to be seen or heard, and therefore he entered, and walked up to the back door, which indeed was the only door for entrance or egress that was ever used. There was a front door opening into a little ragged garden, but this was as much a fixture as the wall. As he was knocking at the back door, it was opened by the farmer himself. Mr. Fenwick had called to inquire whether his friend had secured for him,—as half promised,—the possession of a certain brother of Bone'm's, who was supposed to be of a very pugnacious disposition in the silent watches of the night.

"It's no go, parson."

"Why not, Mr. Trumbull?"

"The truth is, there be such a deal of talk o' thieves about the country, that no one likes to part with such a friend as that. Muster Crickly, over at Imber, he have another big dog, it's true, a reg'lar mastiff, but he do say that Crunch'em be better than the mastiff, and he won't let 'un go, parson,—not for love nor money. I wouldn't let Bone'm go, I know;

not for nothing." Then Mr. Fenwick walked back to the Vicarage, and was half induced to think that as Crunch'em was not to be had, it would be his duty to sit up at night, and look after the plate box himself.

CHAPTER XI

DON'T YOU BE AFEAED ABOUT ME

ON the following morning Mr. Fenwick walked down to the mill. There was a path all along the river, and this was the way he took. He passed different points as he went, and he thought of the trout he had caught there, or had wished to catch, and he thought also how often Sam Brattle had been with him as he had stood there delicately throwing his fly. In those days Sam had been very fond of him, had thought it to be a great thing to be allowed to fish with the parson, and had been reasonably obedient. Now Sam would not even come up to the Vicarage when he was asked to do so. For more than a year after the close of those amicable relations the parson had behaved with kindness and almost with affection to the lad. He had interceded with the Squire when Sam was accused of poaching,—had interceded with the old miller when Sam had given offence at home,—and had even interceded with the constable when there was a rumour in the wind of offences something worse than these. Then had come the occasion on which Mr. Fenwick had told the father that unless the son would change his course evil would come of it; and both father and son had taken this amiss. The father had told the parson to his face that he, the parson, had led his son astray; and the son in his revenge had brought housebreakers down upon his old friend's premises.

“One hasn't to do it for thanks,” said Mr. Fenwick, as he became a little bitter while thinking of all

this. "I'll stick to him as long as I can, if it's only for the old woman's sake,—and for the poor girl whom we used to love." Then he thought of a clear, sweet, young voice that used to be so well known in his village choir, and of the heavy curls, which it was a delight to him to see. It had been a pleasure to him to have such a girl as Carry Brattle in his church, and now Carry Brattle was gone utterly, and would probably never be seen in a church again. These Brattles had suffered much, and he would bear with them, let the task of doing so be ever so hard.

The sound of workmen was to be already heard as he drew near to the mill. There were men there pulling the thatch off the building, and there were carts and horses bringing laths, lime, bricks, and timber, and taking the old rubbish away. As he crossed quickly by the slippery stones he saw old Jacob Brattle standing before the mill looking on, with his hands in his breeches pockets. He was too old to do much at such work as this,—work to which he was not accustomed—and was looking up in a sad melancholy way, as though it were a work of destruction, and not one of reparation.

"We shall have you here as smart as possible before long, Mr. Brattle," said the parson.

"I don't know much about smart, Muster Fenwick. The old place was a'most tumbling down,—but still it would have lasted out my time, I'm thinking. If t' Squire would 'a done it fifteen years ago, I'd 'a thanked un; but I don't know what to say about it now, and this time of year and all, just when the new grist would be coming in. If t' Squire would 'a thought of it in June, now. But things is contrary—a'most allays so." After this speech, which was made in a low,

droning voice, bit by bit, the miller took himself off and went into the house.

At the back of the mill, perched on an old projecting beam, in the midst of dust and dirt, assisting with all the energy of youth in the demolition of the roof, Mr. Fenwick saw Sam Brattle. He perceived at once that Sam had seen him; but the young man immediately averted his eyes and went on with his work. The parson did not speak at once, but stepped over the ruins around him till he came immediately under the beam in question. Then he called to the lad, and Sam was constrained to answer "Yes, Mr. Fenwick, I am here;—hard at work, as you see."

"I do see it, and wish you luck with your job. Spare me ten minutes, and come down and speak to me."

"I am in such a muck now, Mr. Fenwick, that I do wish to go on with it, if you'll let me."

But Mr. Fenwick, having taken so much trouble to get at the young man, was not going to be put off in this way. "Never mind your muck for a quarter of an hour," he said. "I have come here on purpose to find you, and I must speak to you."

"Must!" said Sam, looking down with a very angry lower on his face.

"Yes,—must. Don't be a fool now. You know that I do not wish to injure you. You are not such a coward as to be afraid to speak to me. Come down."

"Afeard! Who talks of being afeard? Stop a moment, Mr. Fenwick, and I'll be with you;—not that I think it will do any good." Then slowly he crept back along the beam and came down through the interior of the building. "What is it, Mr. Fenwick?"

Here I am. I ain't a bit afeard of you at any rate."

"Where have you been the last fortnight, Sam?"

"What right have you to ask me, Mr. Fenwick?"

"I have the right of old friendship, and perhaps also some right from my remembrance of the last place in which I saw you. What has become of that man, Burrows?"

"What Burrows?"

"Jack the Grinder, whom I hit on the back the night I made you a prisoner. Do you think that you were doing well in being in my garden about midnight in company with such a fellow as that,—one of the most notorious jailbirds in the county? Do you know that I could have had you arrested and sent to prison at once?"

"I know you couldn't—do nothing of the kind."

"You know this, Sam,—that I've no wish to do it; that nothing would give me more pain than doing it. But you must feel that if we should hear now of any depredation about the county, we couldn't,—I at least could not,—help thinking of you. And I am told that there will be depredations, Sam. Are you concerned in these matters?"

"No, I am not," said Sam, doggedly.

"Are you disposed to tell me why you were in my garden, and why those men were with you?"

"We were down in the churchyard, and the gate was open, and so we walked up;—that was all. If we'd meant to do anything out of the way we shouldn't 'a come like that, nor yet at that hour. Why, it worn't midnight, Mr. Fenwick."

"But why was there such a man as Burrows with you? Do you think he was fit company for you, Sam?"

"I suppose a chap may choose his own company, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Yes, he may, and go to the gallows because he chooses it, as you are doing."

"Very well; if that's all you've got to say to me, I'll go back to my work."

"Stop one moment, Sam. That is not quite all. I caught you the other night where you had no business to be, and for the sake of your father and mother, and for old recollections, I let you go. Perhaps I was wrong, but I don't mean to hark back upon that again."

"You are a-harking back on it, ever so often."

"I shall take no further steps about it."

"There ain't no steps to be taken, Mr. Fenwick."

"But I see that you intend to defy me, and therefore I am bound to tell you that I shall keep my eye upon you."

"Don't you be afeard about me, Mr. Fenwick."

"And if I hear of those fellows, Burrows and the other, being about the place any more, I shall give the police notice that they are associates of yours. I don't think so badly of you yet, Sam, as to believe you would bring your father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave by turning thief and housebreaker; but when I hear of your being away from home, and nobody knowing where you are, and find that you are living without decent employment, and prowling about at nights with robbers and cut-throats, I cannot but be afraid. Do you know that the Squire recognised you that night as well as I?"

"The Squire ain't nothing to me, and if you've done with me now, Mr. Fenwick, I'll go back to my work." So saying, Sam Brattle again mounted up to

the roof, and the parson returned discomfited to the front of the building. He had not intended to see any of the family, but, as he was crossing the little bridge, meaning to go home round by the Privets, he was stopped by Fanny Brattle.

"I hope it will be all right, now, Mr. Fenwick," the girl said.

"I hope so too, Fanny. But you and your mother should keep an eye on him, so that he may know that his goings and comings are noticed. I dare say it will be all right as long as the excitement of these changes is going on; but there is nothing so bad as that he should be in and out of the house at nights and not feel that his absence is noticed. It will be better always to ask him, though he be ever so cross. Tell your mother I say so."

CHAPTER XII

BONE'M AND HIS MASTER

AFTER leaving the mill Mr. Fenwick went up to the Squire, and, in contradiction, as it were, of all the hard things that he had said to Sam Brattle, spoke to the miller's landlord in the lad's favour. He was hard at work now, at any rate; and seemed inclined to stick to his work. And there had been an independence about him which the parson had half liked, even while he had been offended at it. Gilmore differed altogether from his friend. "What was he doing in your garden? What was he doing hidden in Trumbull's hedge? When I see fellows hiding in ditches at night, I don't suppose that they're after much good." Mr. Fenwick made some lame apology, even for these offences. Sam had, perhaps, not really known the extent of the iniquity of the men with whom he had associated, and had come up the garden probably with a view to the fruit. The matter was discussed at great length, and the Squire at last promised that he would give Sam another chance in regard to his own estimation of the young man's character.

On that same evening,—or, rather, after the evening was over, for it was nearly twelve o'clock at night,—Fenwick walked round the garden and the orchard with his wife. There was no moon now, and the night was very dark. They stopped for a minute at the wicket leading into the churchyard, and it was evident to them that Bone'm, from the farmyard at the other side of the church, had heard them, for he commenced

a low growl, with which the parson was by this time well acquainted.

"Good dog, good dog," said the parson, in a low voice. "I wish we had his brother, I know."

"He would only be tearing the maids and biting the children," said Mrs. Fenwick. "I hate having a savage beast about."

"But it would be so nice to catch a burglar and crunch him. I feel almost bloodthirsty since I hit that fellow with the life-preserver, and find that I didn't kill him."

"I know, Frank, you're thinking about these thieves more than you like to tell me."

"I was thinking just then, that if they were to come and take all the silver it wouldn't do much harm. We should have to buy German plate, and nobody would know the difference."

"Suppose they murdered us all?"

"They never do that now. The profession is different from what it used to be. They only go where they know they can find a certain amount of spoil, and where they can get it without much danger. I don't think housebreakers ever cut throats in these days. They're too fond of their own." Then they both agreed that if these rumours of housebreakings were continued, they would send away the plate some day to be locked up in safe keeping at Salisbury. After that they went to bed.

On the next morning, the Sunday morning, at a few minutes before seven, the parson was awakened by his groom at his bedroom door.

"What is it, Roger?" he asked.

"For the love of God, sir, get up! They've been and murdered Mr. Trumbull."

Mrs. Fenwick, who heard the tidings, screamed; and Mr. Fenwick was out of bed and into his trousers in half a minute. In another half minute Mrs. Fenwick, clothed in her dressing-gown, was upstairs among her children. No doubt she thought that as soon as the poor farmer had been despatched, the murderers would naturally pass on into her nursery. Mr. Fenwick did not believe the tidings. If a man be hurt in the hunting-field, it is always said that he's killed. If the kitchen flue be on fire, it is always said that the house is burned down. Something, however, had probably happened at Farmer Trumbull's; and down went the parson across the garden and orchard, and through the churchyard, as quick as his legs would carry him. In the farmyard he found quite a crowd of men, including the two constables and three or four of the leading tradesmen in the village. The first thing that he saw was the dead body of Bone'm, the dog. He was stiff and stark, and had been poisoned.

"How's Mr. Trumbull?" he asked, of the nearest by-stander.

"Laws, parson, ain't ye heard?" said the man. "They've knocked his skull open with a hammer, and he's as dead—as dead."

Hearing this, the parson turned round, and made his way into the house. There was not a doubt about it. The farmer had been murdered during the night, and his money carried off. Upstairs Mr. Fenwick made his way to the farmer's bedroom, and there lay the body. Mr. Crittenden, the village doctor, was there; and a crowd of men, and an old woman or two. Among the women was Trumbull's sister, the wife of a neighbouring farmer, who, with her husband, a tenant of Mr. Gilmore's, had come over just before the arrival

of Mr. Fenwick. The body had been found on the stairs, and it was quite clear that the farmer had fought desperately with the man or men before he had received the blow which despatched him.

"I told 'um how it be,—I did, I did, when he would 'a all money by 'um."

This was the explanation given by Mr Trumbull's sister, Mrs. Boddle.

It seemed that Trumbull had had in his possession over a hundred and fifty pounds, of which the greater part was in gold, and that he kept this in a money-box in his bedroom. One of the two women who lived in his service,—he himself had been a widower without children,—declared that she had always known that at night he took the box out of his cupboard into bed with him. She had seen it there more than once when she had taken him up drinks when he was unwell. When first interrogated, she declared that she did not remember, at that moment, that she had ever told anybody; she thought she had never told anybody; at last, she would swear that she had never spoken a word about it to a single soul. She was supposed to be a good girl, had come of decent people, and was well known by Mr. Fenwick, of whose congregation she was one. Her name was Agnes Pope. The other servant was an elderly woman, who had been in the house all her life, but was unfortunately deaf. She had known very well about the money, and had always been afraid about it; had very often spoken to her master about it, but never a word to Agnes. She had been woken in the night,—that was, as it turned out, about 2 A. M.,—by the girl who slept with her, and who declared that she had heard a great noise, as of somebody tumbling,—a very great noise indeed, as though there

were ever so many people tumbling. For a long time, for perhaps an hour, they had lain still, being afraid to move. Then the older woman had lighted a candle, and gone down from the garret in which they slept. The first thing she saw was the body of her master, in his shirt, upon the stairs. She had then called up the only other human being who slept on the premises, a shepherd, who had lived for thirty years with Trumbull. This man had thrown open the house, and had gone for assistance, and had found the body of the dead dog in the yard.

Before nine o'clock the facts, as they have been told, were known everywhere, and the Squire was down on the spot. The man,—or, as it was presumed, men,—had entered by the unaccustomed front door, which was so contrived as to afford the easiest possible mode of getting into the house; whereas, the back door, which was used by everybody, had been bolted and barred with all care. The men must probably have entered by the churchyard and the back gate of the farmyard, as that had been found to be unlatched, whereas the gate leading out on to the road had been found closed. The farmer himself had always been very careful to close both these gates when he let out Bone'm before going to bed. Poor Bone'm had been enticed to his death by a piece of poisoned meat, thrown to him probably some considerable time before the attack was made.

Who were the murderers? That of course was the first question. It need hardly be said with how sad a heart Mr. Fenwick discussed this matter with the Squire. Of course inquiry must be made of the manner in which Sam Brattle had passed the night. Heavens! how would it be with that poor family if he had been

concerned in such an affair as this! And then there came across the parson's mind a remembrance that Agnes Pope and Sam Brattle had been seen by him together, on more Sundays than one. In his anxiety, and with much imprudence, he went to the girl and questioned her again.

"For your own sake, Agnes, tell me, are you sure you never mentioned about the money-box to—Sam Brattle?"

The girl blushed and hesitated, and then said that she was quite sure she never had. She didn't think she had ever said ten words to Sam since she knew about the box.

"But five words would be sufficient, Agnes."

"Then them five words was never spoke, sir," said the girl. But still she blushed, and the parson thought that her manner was not in her favour.

It was necessary that the parson should attend to his church; but the Squire, who was a magistrate, went down with the two constables to the mill. There they found Sam and his father, with Mrs. Brattle and Fanny. No one went to the church from the mill on that day. The news had reached them of the murder, and they all felt—though no one of them had so said to any other—that something might in some way connect them with the deed that had been done. Sam had hardly spoken since he had heard of Mr. Trumbull's death; though when he saw that his father was perfectly silent, as one struck with some sudden dread, he bade the old man hold up his head and fear nothing. Old Brattle, when so addressed, seated himself in his arm-chair, and there remained without a word till the magistrate with the constables were among them.

There were not many at church, and Mr. Fenwick made the service very short. He could not preach the sermon which he had prepared, but said a few words on the terrible catastrophe which had occurred so near to them. This man who was now lying within only a few yards of them, with his brains knocked out, had been alive among them, strong and in good health, yesterday evening! And there had come into their peaceful village miscreants who had been led on from self-indulgence to idleness, and from idleness to theft, and from theft to murder! We all know the kind of words which the parson spoke, and the thrill of attention with which they would be heard. Here was a man who had been close to them, and therefore the murder came home to them all, and filled them with an excitement which, alas! was not probably without some feeling of pleasure. But the sermon, if sermon it could be called, was very short, and when it was over, the parson also hurried down to the mill.

It had already been discovered that Sam Brattle had certainly been out during the night. He had himself denied this at first, saying, that though he had been the last to go to bed, he had gone to bed about eleven, and had not left the mill-house till late in the morning;—but his sister had heard him rise, and had seen his body through the gloom as he passed beneath the window of the room in which she slept. She had not heard him return, but, when she arose at six, had found out that he was then in the house. He manifested no anger against her when she gave this testimony, but acknowledged that he had been out, that he had wandered up to the road, and explained his former denial frankly,—or with well-assumed frankness,—by saying that he would, if possible, for his father's and

mother's sake, have concealed the fact that he had been away,—knowing that his absence would give rise to suspicions which would well-nigh break their hearts. He had not, however,—so he said,—been any nearer to Bullhampton than the point of the road opposite to the lodge of Hampton Privets, from whence the lane turned down to the mill. What had he been doing down there? He had done nothing, but sat and smoked on a stile by the road side. Had he seen any strangers? Here he paused, but at last declared that he had seen none, but had heard the sound of wheels and of a pony's feet upon the road. The vehicle, whatever it was, must have passed on towards Bullhampton just before he reached the road. Had he followed the vehicle? No;—he had thought of doing so, but had not. Could he guess who was in the vehicle? By this time many surmises had been made aloud as to Jack the Grinder and his companion, and it had become generally known that the parson had encountered two such men in his own garden some nights previously. Sam, when he was pressed, said that the idea had come into his mind that the vehicle was the Grinder's cart. He had no knowledge, he said, that the man was coming to Bullhampton on that night;—but the man had said in his hearing, that he would like to strip the parson's peaches. He was asked also about Farmer Trumbull's money. He declared that he had never heard that the farmer kept money in the house. He did know that the farmer was accounted to be a very saving man,—but that was all that he knew. He was as much surprised, he said, as any of them at what had occurred. Had the men turned the other way and robbed the parson he would have been less surprised. He acknowledged that he

had called the parson a turn-coat and a meddling tell-tale, in the presence of these men.

All this ended of course in Sam's arrest. He had himself seen from the first that it would be so, and had bade his mother take comfort and hold up her head. "It won't be for long, mother. I ain't got any of the money, and they can't bring it nigh me." He was taken away to be locked up at Heytesbury that night, in order that he might be brought before the bench of magistrates which would sit at that place on Tuesday. Squire Gilmore for the present committed him.

The parson remained for some time with the old man and his wife after Sam was gone, but he soon found that he could be of no service by doing so. The miller himself would not speak, and Mrs. Brattle was utterly prostrated by her husband's misery.

"I do not know what to say about it," said Mr. Fenwick to his wife that night. "The suspicion is very strong; but I cannot say that I have an opinion one way or the other." There was no sermon in Bullhampton Church on that Sunday afternoon.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN MARRABLE AND HIS FATHER

ONLY that it is generally conceived that in such a history as is this the writer of the tale should be able to make his points so clear by words that no further assistance should be needed, I should be tempted here to insert a properly illustrated pedigree tree of the Marrable family. The Marrable family is of very old standing in England, the first baronet having been created by James I., and there having been Marrables,—as is well known by all attentive readers of English history,—engaged in the Wars of the Roses, and again others very conspicuous in the religious persecutions of the children of Henry VIII. I do not know that they always behaved with consistency; but they held their heads up after a fashion, and got themselves talked of, and were people of note in the country. They were cavaliers in the time of Charles I. and of Cromwell,—as became men of blood and gentlemen,—but it is not recorded of them that they sacrificed much in the cause; and when William III. became king they submitted with a good grace to the new order of things. A certain Sir Thomas Marrable was member for his county in the reigns of George I. and George II., and enjoyed a lucrative confidence with Walpole. Then there came a blustering, roustering Sir Thomas, who, together with a fine man and gambler as an heir, brought the property to rather a low ebb; so that when Sir

Gregory, the grandfather of our Miss Marrable, came to the title in the early days of George III. he was not a rich man. His two sons, another Sir Gregory and a General Marrable, died long before the days of which we are writing,—Sir Gregory in 1815, and the General in 1820. That Sir Gregory was the second of the name,—the second at least as mentioned in these pages. He had been our Miss Marrable's uncle, and the General had been her father, and the father of Mrs. Lowther,—Mary's mother. A third Sir Gregory was reigning at the time of our story, a very old gentleman with one single son,—a fourth Gregory. Now the residence of Sir Gregory was at Dunripple Park, just on the borders of Warwickshire and Worcestershire, but in the latter county. The property was small,—for a country gentleman with a title,—not much exceeding £3000 a year; and there was no longer any sitting in Parliament, or keeping of race-horses, or indeed any season in town for the present race of Marrables. The existing Sir Gregory was a very quiet man, and his son and only child, a man now about forty years of age, lived mostly at home, and occupied himself with things of antiquity. He was remarkably well read in the history of his own country, and it had been understood for the last twenty years by the Antiquarian, Archæological, and other societies that he was the projector of a new theory about Stonehenge, and that his book on the subject was almost ready. Such were the two surviving members of the present senior branch of the family. But Sir Gregory had two brothers,—the younger of the two being Parson John Marrable, the present rector of St. Peter's Lowtown and the occupier of the house within the heavy slate-coloured gates, where he lived a bachelor life, as had

done before him his cousin the late rector;—the elder being a certain Colonel Marrable. The Colonel Marrable again had a son, who was a Captain Walter Marrable,—and after him the confused reader shall be introduced to no more of the Marrable family. The enlightened reader will have by this time perceived that Miss Mary Lowther and Captain Walter Marrable were second cousins; and he will also have perceived, if he has given his mind fully to the study, that the present Parson John Marrable had come into the living after the death of a cousin of the same generation as himself,—but of lower standing in the family. It was so; and by this may be seen how little the Sir Gregory of the present day had been able to do for his brother, and perhaps it may also be imagined from this that the present clergyman at Loring Lowtown had been able to do very little for himself. Nevertheless, he was a kindly-hearted, good, sincere old man,—not very bright, indeed, nor peculiarly fitted for preaching the gospel, but he was much liked, and he kept a curate, though his income out of the living was small. Now it so happened that Captain Marrable,—Walter Marrable,—came to stay with his uncle the parson about the same time that Mary Lowther returned to Loring.

“You remember Walter, do you not?” said Miss Marrable to her niece.

“Not the least in the world. I remember there was a Walter when I was at Dunripple. But that was ten years ago, and boy cousins and girl cousins never fraternise.”

“I suppose he was nearly a young man then, and you were a child?”

“He was still at school, though just leaving it. He is seven years older than I am.”

"He is coming to stay with Parson John."

"You don't say so, Aunt Sarah? What will such a man as Captain Marrable do at Loring?"

Then Aunt Sarah explained all that she knew, and perhaps suggested more than she knew. Walter Marrable had quarrelled with his father, the Colonel,—with whom, indeed, everybody of the name of Marrable had always been quarrelling, and who was believed by Miss Marrable to be the very—mischief himself. He was a man always in debt, who had broken his wife's heart, who lived with low company and disgraced the family, who had been more than once arrested, on whose behalf all the family interest had been expended, so that nobody else could get anything, and who gambled and drank and did whatever wicked things a wicked old colonel living at Portsmouth could do. And indeed, hitherto, Miss Marrable had entertained opinions hardly more charitable respecting the son than she had done in regard to the father. She had disbelieved in this branch of the Marrables altogether. Captain Marrable had lived with his father a good deal,—at least, so she had understood,—and therefore could not but be bad. And, moreover, our Miss Sarah Marrable had, throughout her whole life, been somewhat estranged from the elder branches of the family. Her father, Walter, had been—so she thought—injured by his brother Sir Gregory, and there had been some law proceedings, not quite amicable, between her brother the parson, and the present Sir Gregory. She respected Sir Gregory as the head of the family, but she never went now to Dunripple, and knew nothing of Sir Gregory's heir. Of the present Parson John she had thought very little before he had come to Loring. Since he had been living there she had found that

blood was thicker than water,—as she would say,—and they two were intimate. When she heard that Captain Marrable was coming, because he had quarrelled with his father, she began to think that perhaps it might be as well that she should allow herself to meet this new cousin.

“What do you think of your cousin, Walter?” the old clergyman said to his nephew, one evening, after the two ladies, who had been dining at the Rectory, had left them. It was the first occasion on which Walter Marrable had met Mary since his coming to Loring.

“I remember her as well as if it were yesterday, at Dunripple. She was a little girl then, and I thought her the most beautiful little girl in the world.”

“We all think her very beautiful still.”

“So she is; as lovely as ever she can stand. But she does not seem to have much to say for herself. I remember when she was a little girl she never would speak.”

“I fancy she can talk when she pleases, Walter. But you mustn’t fall in love with her.”

“I won’t, if I can help it.”

“In the first place I think she is as good as engaged to a fellow with a very pretty property in Wiltshire, and in the next place she hasn’t got—one shilling.”

“There is not much danger. I am not inclined to trouble myself about any girl in my present mood, even if she had the pretty property herself, and wasn’t engaged to anybody. I suppose I shall get over it some day, but I feel just at present as though I couldn’t say a kind word to a human being.”

“Psha! psha! that’s nonsense, Walter. Take things

coolly. They're more likely to come right, and they won't be so troublesome, even if they don't." Such was the philosophy of Parson John,—for the sake of digesting which the captain lit a cigar, and went out to smoke it, standing at one of the open slate-coloured gates.

It was said in the first chapter of this story that Mr. Gilmore was one of the heroes whose deeds the story undertakes to narrate, and a hint was perhaps expressed that of all the heroes he was the favourite. Captain Marrable is, however, another hero, and, as such, some word or two must be said of him. He was a better-looking man, certainly, than Mr. Gilmore, though perhaps his personal appearance did not at first sight give to the observer so favourable an idea of his character as did that of the other gentleman. Mr. Gilmore was to be read at a glance as an honest, straightforward, well-behaved country squire, whose word might be taken for anything, who might, perhaps, like to have his own way, but who could hardly do a cruel or an unfair thing. He was just such a man to look at as a prudent mother would select as one to whom she might entrust her daughter with safety. Now Walter Marrable's countenance was of a very different die. He had served in India, and the naturally dark colour of his face had thus become very swarthy. His black hair curled round his head, but the curls on his brow were becoming very thin, as though age were already telling on them, and yet he was four or five years younger than Mr. Gilmore. His eyebrows were thick and heavy, and his eyes seemed to be black. They were eyes which were used without much motion; and when they were dead set, as they were not unfrequently, it would seem as though he were defying

those on whom he looked. Thus he made many afraid of him, and many who were not afraid of him, disliked him because of a certain ferocity which seemed to characterise his face. He wore no beard beyond a heavy black moustache, which quite covered his upper lip. His nose was long and straight, his mouth large, and his chin square. No doubt he was a handsome man. And he looked to be a tall man, though in truth he lacked two full inches of the normal six feet. He was broad across the chest, strong on his legs, and was altogether such a man to look at that few would care to quarrel with him, and many would think that he was disposed to quarrel. Of his nature he was not quarrelsome; but he was a man who certainly had received much injury. It need not be explained at length how his money affairs had gone wrong with him. He should have inherited, and, indeed, did inherit, a fortune from his mother's family, of which his father had contrived absolutely to rob him. It was only within the last month that he had discovered that his father had succeeded in laying his hands on certainly the bulk of his money, and it might be upon all. Words between them had been very bitter. The father, with a cigar between his teeth, had told his son that this was the fortune of war, that if justice had been done him at his marriage, the money would have been his own, and that by G— he was very sorry, and couldn't say anything more. The son had called the father a liar and a swindler,—as, indeed, was the truth, though the son was doubtless wrong to say so to the author of his being. The father had threatened the son with his horsewhip; and so they had parted, within ten days of Walter Marrable's return from India.

Walter had written to his two uncles, asking their advice as to saving the wreck, if anything might be saved. Sir Gregory had written back to say that he was an old man, that he was greatly grieved at the misunderstanding, and that Messrs. Block and Curling were the family lawyers. Parson John invited his nephew to come down to Loring Lowtown. Captain Marrable went to Block and Curling, who were by no means consolatory, and accepted his uncle's invitation.

It was but three days after the first meeting between the two cousins, that they were to be seen one evening walking together along the banks of the Lurwell, a little river which at Loring sometimes takes the appearance of a canal, and sometimes of a natural stream. But it is commercial, having connection with the Kennet and Avon navigation; and long, slow, ponderous barges, with heavy, dirty, sleepy bargemen, and rickety, ill-used barge-horses, are common in the neighbourhood. In parts it is very pretty, as it runs under the chalky downs, and there are a multiplicity of locks, and the turf of the sheep-walks comes up to the towing path; but in the close neighbourhood of the town the canal is straight and uninteresting; the ground is level, and there is a scattering community of small, straight-built light-brick houses, which are in themselves so ugly that they are incompatible with anything that is pretty in landscape.

Parson John, always so called to distinguish him from the late parson, his cousin, who had been the Rev. James Marrable, had taken occasion, on behalf of his nephew, to tell the story of his wrong to Miss Marrable, and by Miss Marrable it had been told to Mary. To both these ladies the thing seemed to be so horrible,—

the idea that a father should have robbed his son,— that the stern ferocity of the slow-moving eyes was forgiven, and they took him to their hearts, if not for love, at least for pity. Twenty thousand pounds ought to have become the property of Walter Marrable, when some maternal relative had died. It had seemed hard that the father should have none of it, and, on the receipt in India of representations from the Colonel, Walter had signed certain fatal papers, the effect of which was that the father had laid his hands on pretty nearly the whole, if not on the whole, of the money, and had caused it to vanish. There was now a question whether some five thousand pounds might not be saved. If so, Walter would stay in England; if not, he would exchange and go back to India; “or,” as he said himself, “to the Devil.”

“Don’t speak of it in that way,” said Mary.

“The worst of it is,” said he, “that I am ashamed of myself for being so absolutely cut up about money. A man should be able to bear that kind of thing; but this hits one all round.”

“I think you bear it very well.”

“No, I don’t. I didn’t bear it well when I called my father a swindler. I didn’t bear it well when I swore that I would put him in prison for robbing me. I don’t bear it well now, when I think of it every moment. But I do so hate India, and I had so absolutely made up my mind never to return. If it hadn’t been that I knew that this fortune was to be mine, I could have saved money, hand over hand.”

“Can’t you live on your pay here?”

“No!” He answered her almost as though he were angry with her. “If I had been used all my life to the strictest economies, perhaps I might do so. Some

men do, no doubt; but I am too old to begin it. There is the choice of two things,—to blow my brains out, or go back.”

“You are not such a coward as that.”

“I don’t know. I ain’t sure that it would be cowardice. If there were anybody I could injure by doing it, it would be cowardly.”

“The family,” suggested Mary.

“What does Sir Gregory care for me? I’ll show you his letter to me some day. I don’t think it would be cowardly at all to get away from such a lot.”

“I am sure you won’t do that, Captain Marrable.”

“Think what it is to know that your father is a swindler. Perhaps that is the worst of it all. Fancy talking or thinking of one’s family after that. I like my uncle John. He is very kind, and has offered to lend me £150, which I’m sure he can’t afford to lose, and which I am too honest to take. But even he hardly sees it. He calls it a misfortune, and I’ve no doubt would shake hands with his brother to-morrow.”

“So would you, if he were really sorry.”

“No, Mary; nothing on earth shall ever induce me to set my eyes on him again willingly. He has destroyed all the world for me. He should have had half of it without a word. When he used to whine to me in his letters, and say how cruelly he had been treated, I always made up my mind that he should have half the income for life. It was because he should not want till I came home that I enabled him to do what he has done. And now he has robbed me of every cursed shilling! I wonder whether I shall ever get my mind free from it.”

“Of course you will.”

"It seems now that my heart is wrapped in lead."

As they were coming home she put her hand upon his arm, and asked him to promise her to withdraw that threat.

"Why should I withdraw it? Who cares for me?"

"We all care. My aunt cares. I care."

"The threat means nothing, Mary. People who make such threats don't carry them out. Of course I shall go on and endure it. The worst of all is, that the whole thing makes me so unmanly,—makes such a beast of me. But I'll try to get over it."

Mary Lowther thought that, upon the whole, he bore his misfortune very well.

CHAPTER XIV

COUSINHOOD

MARY LOWTHER and her cousin had taken their walk together on Monday evening, and on the next morning she received the following letter from Mrs. Fenwick. When it reached her she had as yet heard nothing of the Bullhampton tragedy.

“Vicarage, Monday, Sept. 1, 186—

“DEAREST MARY,

“I suppose you will have heard before you get this of the dreadful murder that has taken place here, and which has so startled and horrified us, that we hardly know what we are doing even yet. It is hard to say why a thing should be worse because it is close, but it certainly is so. Had it been in the next parish, or even further off in this parish, I do not think that I should feel it so much, and then we knew the old man so well, and then, again,—which makes it worst of all,—we all of us are unable to get rid of a suspicion that one whom we knew, and was liked, has been a participator in the crime.

“It seems that it must have been about two o'clock on Sunday morning that Mr. Trumbull was killed. It was, at any rate, between one and three. As far as they can judge, they think that there must have been three men concerned. You remember how we used to joke about poor Mr. Trumbull's dog. Well, he was poisoned first,—probably an hour before the men got into the house. It has been discovered that the fool-

ish old man kept a large sum of money by him in a box, and that he always took this box into bed with him. The woman, who lived in the house with him, used to see it there. No doubt the thieves had heard of this, and both Frank and Mr. Gilmore think that the girl, Agnes Pope, whom you will remember in the choir, told about it. She lived with Mr. Trumbull, and we all thought her a very good girl,—though she was too fond of that young man, Sam Brattle.

“They think that the men did not mean to do the murder, but that the old man fought so hard for his money that they were driven to it. His body was not in the room, but on the top of the stairs, and his temple had been split open with a blow of a hammer. The hammer lay beside him, and was one belonging to the house. Mr. Gilmore says that there was great craft in their using a weapon which they did not bring with them. Of course they cannot be traced by the hammer.

“They got off with £150 in the box, and did not touch anything else. Everybody feels quite sure that they knew all about the money, and that when Mr. Gilmore saw them that night down at the churchyard corner, they were prowling about with a view of seeing how they could get into the farmer’s house, and not into the Vicarage. Frank thinks that when he afterwards found them in our place, Sam Brattle had brought them in with a kind of wild idea of taking the fruit, but that the men, of their own account, had come round to reconnoitre the house. They both say that there can be no doubt about the men having been the same. Then comes the terrible question whether Sam Brattle, the son of that dear woman at the mill, has been one of the murderers. He had been at home all

the previous day working very hard at the works,— which are being done in obedience to your orders, my dear; but he certainly was out on the Saturday night.

“It is very hard to get at any man’s belief in such matters, but, as far as I can understand them, I don’t think that either Frank or Mr. Gilmore do really believe that he was there. Frank says that it will go very hard with him, and Mr. Gilmore has committed him. The magistrates are to sit to-morrow at Heytesbury, and Mr. Gilmore will be there. He has, as you may be sure, behaved as well as possible, and has quite altered in his manner to the old people. I was at the mill this morning. Brattle himself would not speak to me, but I sat for an hour with Mrs. Brattle and Fanny. It makes it almost the more melancholy having all the rubbish and building things about, and yet the work stopped.

“Fanny Brattle has behaved so well! It was she who told that her brother had been out at night. Mr. Gilmore says that when the question was asked in his presence, she answered it in her own quiet, simple way, without a moment’s doubt; but since that she has never ceased to assert her conviction that her brother has had nothing to do either with the murder or with the robbery. If it had not been for this, Mrs. Brattle would, I think, have sunk under the load. Fanny says the same thing constantly to her father. He scolds her, and bids her hold her tongue; but she goes on, and I think it has some effect even on him. The whole place does look such a picture of ruin! It would break your heart to see it. And then, when one looks at the father and mother, one remembers about that other child, and is almost tempted to ask

why such misery should have fallen upon parents who have been honest, sober, and industrious. Can it really be that the man is being punished here on earth because he will not believe? When I hinted this to Frank, he turned upon me, and scolded me, and told me I was measuring the Almighty God with a foot-rule. But men were punished in the Bible because they did not believe. Remember the Baptist's father. But I never dare to go on with Frank on these matters.

"I am so full of this affair of poor Mr. Trumbull, and so anxious about Sam Brattle, that I cannot now write about anything else. I can only say that no man ever behaved with greater kindness and propriety than Harry Gilmore, who has had to act as magistrate. Poor Fanny Brattle has to go to Heytesbury to-morrow to give her evidence. At first they said that they must take the father also, but he is to be spared for the present.

"I should tell you that Sam himself declares that he got to know these men at a place where he was at work, brickmaking, near Devizes. He had quarrelled with his father, and had got a job there, with high wages. He used to be out at night with them, and acknowledges that he joined one of them, a man named Burrows, in stealing a brood of pea-fowl which some poulterers wanted to buy. He says he looked on it as a joke. Then it seems he had some spite against Trumbull's dog, and that this man, Burrows, came over here on purpose to take the dog away. This, according to his story, is all that he knows of the man; and he says that on that special Saturday night he had not the least idea that Burrows was at Bullhampton, till he heard the sound of a certain cart on the road. I

tell you all this, as I am sure you will share our anxiety respecting this unfortunate young man,—because of his mother and sister.

“Good-bye, dearest; Frank sends ever so many loves;—and somebody else would send them too, if he thought that I would be the bearer. Try to think so well of Bullhampton as to make you wish to live here.—Give my kindest love to your Aunt Sarah.

“Your most affectionate friend,

“JANET FENWICK.”

Mary was obliged to read the letter twice before she completely understood it. Old Mr. Trumbull murdered! Why she had known the old man well, had always been in the habit of speaking to him when she met him either at the one gate or the other of the farmyard,—had joked with him about Bone'm, and had heard him assert his own perfect security against robbers not a week before the night on which he was murdered! As Mrs. Fenwick had said, the truth is so much more real when it comes from things that are near. And then she had so often heard the character of Sam Brattle described,—the man who was now in prison as a murderer! And she herself had given lessons in singing to Agnes Pope, who was now in some sort accused of aiding the thieves. And she herself had asked Agnes whether it was not foolish for her to be hanging about the farmyard, outside her master's premises, with Sam Brattle. It was all brought very near to her!

Before that day was over she was telling the story to Captain Marrable. She had of course told it to her aunt, and they had been discussing it the whole morning. Mr. Gilmore's name had been mentioned to Cap-

tain Marrable, but very little more than the name. Aunt Sarah, however, had already begun to think whether it might not be prudent to tell cousin Walter the story of the half-formed engagement. Mary had expressed so much sympathy with her cousin's wrongs, that Aunt Sarah had begun to fear that sympathy might lead to a tenderer feeling, and Aunt Sarah was by no means anxious that her niece should fall in love with a gentleman whose chief attraction was the fact that he had been ruined by his own father, even though that gentleman was a Marrable himself. This danger might possibly be lessened if Captain Marrable were made acquainted with the Gilmore affair, and taught to understand how desirable such a match would be for Mary. But Aunt Sarah had qualms of conscience on the subject. She doubted whether she had a right to tell the story without leave from Mary; and then there was in truth no real engagement. She knew indeed that Mr. Gilmore had made the offer more than once; but then she knew also that the offer had at any rate not as yet been accepted, and she felt that on Mr. Gilmore's account as well as on Mary's she ought to hold her tongue. It might indeed be admissible to tell to a cousin that which she would not tell to an indifferent young man; but, nevertheless, she could not bring herself to do, even with so good an object, that which she believed to be wrong.

That evening Mary was again walking on the towing-path beside the river with her cousin Walter. She had met him now about five times, and there was already an intimacy between them. The idea of cousinly intimacy to girls is undoubtedly very pleasant; and I do not know whether it is not the fact that the better and the purer is the girl, the sweeter and the

pleasanter is the idea. In America a girl may form a friendly intimacy with any young man she fancies, and though she may not be free from little jests and good-humoured joking, there is no injury to her from such intimacy. It is her acknowledged right to enjoy herself after that fashion, and to have what she calls a good time with young men. A dozen such intimacies do not stand in her way when there comes some real adorer who means to marry her and is able to do so. She rides with these friends, walks with them, and corresponds with them. She goes out to balls and picnics with them, and afterwards lets herself in with a latchkey, while her papa and mamma are a-bed and asleep, with perfect security. If there be much to be said against the practice, there is also something to be said for it. Girls on the other hand, on the continent of Europe, do not dream of making friendship with any man. A cousin with them is as much out of the question as the most perfect stranger. In strict families, a girl is hardly allowed to go out with her brother; and I have heard of mothers who thought it indiscreet that a father should be seen alone with his daughter at a theatre. All friendships between the sexes must, under such a social code, be looked forward to as post-nuptial joys. Here in England there is a something betwixt the two. The intercourse between young men and girls is free enough to enable the latter to feel how pleasant it is to be able to forget for awhile conventional restraints, and to acknowledge how joyous a thing it is to indulge in social intercourse in which the simple delight of equal mind meeting equal mind in equal talk is just enhanced by the unconscious remembrance that boys and girls when they meet together may learn to love. There is nothing more sweet

in youth than this, nothing more natural, nothing more fitting, nothing, indeed, more essentially necessary for God's purposes with his creatures. Nevertheless, here with us, there is the restriction, and it is seldom that a girl can allow herself the full flow of friendship with a man who is not old enough to be her father, unless he is her lover as well as her friend. But cousinhood does allow some escape from the hardship of this rule. Cousins are Tom, and Jack, and George, and Dick. Cousins probably know all or most of your little family secrets. Cousins, perhaps, have romped with you, and scolded you, and teased you, when you were young. Cousins are almost the same as brothers, and yet they may be lovers. There is certainly a great relief in cousinhood.

Mary Lowther had no brother. She had neither brother nor sister;—had since her earliest infancy hardly known any other relative save her aunt and old Parson John. When first she had heard that Walter Marrable was at Loring, the tidings gave her no pleasure whatever. It never occurred to her to say to herself: "Now I shall have one who may become my friend, and be to me perhaps almost a brother?" What she had hitherto heard of Walter Marrable had not been in his favour. Of his father she had heard all that was bad, and she had joined the father and the son together in what few ideas she had formed respecting them. But now, after five interviews, Walter Marrable was her dear cousin, with whom she sympathised, of whom she was proud, whose misfortunes were in some degree her misfortunes, to whom she thought she could very soon tell this great trouble of her life about Mr. Gilmore, as though he were indeed her brother. And she had learned to like his dark

staring eyes, which now always seemed to be fixed on her with something of real regard. She liked them the better, perhaps, because there was in them so much of real admiration; though if it were so, Mary knew nothing of such liking herself. And now at his bidding she called him Walter. He had addressed her by her Christian name at first, as a matter of course, and she had felt grateful to him for doing so. But she had not dared to be so bold with him, till he had bade her do so, and now she felt that he was a cousin indeed. Captain Marrable was at present waiting, not with much patience, for tidings from Block and Curling. Would that £5000 be saved for him, or must he again go out to India and be heard of no more at home in his own England? Mary was not so impatient as the Captain, but she also was intensely interested in the expected letters. On this day, however, their conversation chiefly ran on the news which Mary had that morning heard from Bullhampton.

"I suppose you feel sure," said the Captain, "that young Sam Brattle was one of the murderers?"

"Oh, no, Walter."

"Or at least one of the thieves?"

"But both Mr. Fenwick and Mr. Gilmore think that he is innocent."

"I do not gather that from what your friend says. She says that she thinks that they think so. And then it is clear that he was hanging about the place before with the very men who have committed the crime; and that there was a way in which he might have heard and probably had heard of the money; and then he was out and about that very night."

"Still I can't believe it. If you knew the sort of people his father and mother are." Captain Marrable

could not but reflect that, if an honest gentleman might have a swindler for his father, an honest miller might have a thief for his son. "And then if you saw the place at which they live! I have a particular interest about it."

"Then the young man, of course, must be innocent."

"Don't laugh at me, Walter."

"Why is the place so interesting to you?"

"I can hardly tell you why. The father and the mother are interesting people, and so is the sister. And in their way they are so good! And they have had great troubles,—very great troubles. And the place is so cool and pretty, all surrounded by streams and old pollard willows, with a thatched roof that comes in places nearly to the ground; and then the sound of the mill wheel is the pleasantest sound I know anywhere."

"I will hope he is innocent, Mary."

"I do so hope he is innocent! And then my friends are so much interested about the family. The Fenwicks are very fond of them, and Mr. Gilmore is their landlord."

"He is the magistrate?"

"Yes, he is the magistrate."

"What sort of fellow is he?"

"A very good sort of fellow; such a sort that he can hardly be better; a perfect gentleman."

"Indeed! And has he a perfect lady for his wife?"

"Mr. Gilmore is not married."

"What age is he?"

"I think he is thirty-three."

"With a nice estate and not married! What a chance you have left behind you, Mary!"

“Do you think, Walter, that a girl ought to wish to marry a man merely because he is a perfect gentleman, and has a nice estate and is not yet married?”

“They say that they generally do;—don’t they?”

“I hope you don’t think so. Any girl would be very fortunate to marry Mr. Gilmore—if she loved him.”

“But you don’t?”

“You know I am not talking about myself, and you oughtn’t to make personal allusions.”

These cousinly walks along the banks of the Lurwell were not probably favourable to Mr. Gilmore’s hopes.

CHAPTER XV

THE POLICE AT FAULT

THE magistrates sat at Heytesbury on the Tuesday, and Sam Brattle was remanded. An attorney thus was employed on his behalf by Mr. Fenwick. The parson on the Monday evening had been down at the mill, and had pressed strongly on the old miller the necessity of getting some legal assistance for his son. At first Mr. Brattle was stern, immovable, and almost dumb. He sat on the bench outside his door, with his eyes fixed on the dismantled mill, and shook his head wearily, as though sick and sore with the words that were being addressed to him. Mrs. Brattle the while stood in the doorway, and listened without uttering a sound. If the parson could not prevail, it would be quite out of the question that any word of hers should do good. There she stood, wiping the tears from her eyes, looking on wishfully, while her husband did not even know that she was there. At last he rose from his seat, and hallooed to her. "Maggie," said he, "Maggie." She stepped forward, and put her hand upon his shoulder. "Bring me down the purse, mother," he said.

"There will be nothing of that kind wanted," said the parson.

"Them gentlemen don't work for such as our boy for nothin'," said the miller. "Bring me the purse, mother, I say. There ar'n't much in it, but there's a few guineas as 'll do for that, perhaps. As well pitch 'em away that way as any other."

Mr. Fenwick, of course, declined to take the money. He would make the lawyer understand that he would be properly paid for his trouble, and that for the present would suffice. Only, as he explained, it was expedient that he should have the father's authority. Should any question on the matter arise, it would be better for the young man that he should be defended by his father's aid than by that of a stranger. "I understand, Mr. Fenwick," said the old man,— "I understand; and it's neighbourly of you. But it'd be better that you'd just leave us alone to go out like the snuff of a candle."

"Father," said Fanny, "I won't have you speak in that way, making out our Sam to be guilty before ere a one else has said so."

The miller shook his head again, but said nothing further, and the parson, having received the desired authority, returned to the Vicarage.

The attorney had been employed, and Sam had been remanded. There was no direct evidence against him, and nothing could be done until the other men should be taken, for whom they were seeking. The police had tracked the two men back to a cottage, about fifteen miles distant from Bullhampton, in which lived an old woman, who was the mother of the Grinder. With Mrs. Burrows they found a young woman who had lately come to live there, and who was said in the neighbourhood to be the Grinder's wife.

But nothing more could be learned of the Grinder than that he had been at the cottage on the Sunday morning, and had gone away, according to his wont. The old woman swore that he slept there the whole of Saturday night, but of course the policemen had not believed her statement. When does any policeman ever

believe anything? Of the pony and cart the old woman declared she knew nothing. Her son had no pony, and no cart, to her knowing. Then she went on to declare that she knew very little about her son, who never lived with her; and that she had only taken in the young woman out of charity, about two weeks since. The mother did not for a moment pretend that her son was an honest man, getting his bread after an honest fashion. The Grinder's mode of life was too well known for even a mother to attempt to deny it. But she pretended that she was very honest herself, and appealed to sundry brandy-balls and stale biscuits in her window, to prove that she lived after a decent, honest, commercial fashion.

Sam was of course remanded. The head constable of the district asked for a week more to make fresh inquiry, and expressed a very strong opinion that he would have the Grinder and his friend by the heels before the week should be over. The Heytesbury attorney made a feeble request that Sam might be released on bail, as there was not, according to his statement, "the remotest shadow of a tittle of evidence against him." But poor Sam was sent back to gaol, and there remained for that week. On the next Tuesday the same scene was re-enacted. The Grinder had not been taken, and a further remand was necessary. The face of the head constable was longer on this occasion than it had been before, and his voice less confident. The Grinder, he thought, must have caught one of the early Sunday trains, and made his way to Birmingham. It had been ascertained that he had friends at Birmingham. Another remand was asked for a week, with an understanding that at the end of the week it should be renewed if necessary. The police-

man seemed to think that by that time, unless the Grinder were below the sod, his presence above it would certainly be proved. On this occasion the Heytesbury attorney made a very loud demand for Sam's liberation, talking of habeas corpus, and the injustice of carceration without evidence of guilt. But the magistrates would not let him go. "When I'm told that the young man was seen hiding in a ditch close to the murdered man's house, only a few days before the murder, is that no evidence against him, Mr. Jones?" said Sir Thomas Charleys, of Charlicoats.

"No evidence at all, Sir Thomas. If I had been found asleep in the ditch, that would have been no evidence against me."

"Yes, it would, very strong evidence; and I would have committed you on it, without hesitation, Mr. Jones."

Mr. Jones made a spirited rejoinder to this; but it was of no use, and poor Sam was sent back to gaol for the third time.

For the first ten days after the murder nothing was done as to the works at the mill. The men who had been employed by Brattle ceased to come, apparently of their own account, and everything was lying there just in the state in which the men had left the place on the Saturday night. There was something inexpressibly sad in this, as the old man could not even make a pretence of going into the mill for employment, and there was absolutely nothing to which he could put his hands, to do it. When ten days were over, Gilmore came down to the mill, and suggested that the works should be carried on and finished by him. If the mill were not kept at work, the old man could not live, and no rent would be paid. At any rate, it

would be better that this great sorrow should not be allowed so to cloud everything as to turn industry into idleness, and straitened circumstances into absolute beggary. But the Squire found it very difficult to deal with the miller. At first old Brattle would neither give nor withhold his consent. When told by the Squire that the property could not be left in that way, he expressed himself willing to go out into the road, and lay himself down and die there;—but not until the term of his holding was legally brought to a close. “I don’t know that I owe any rent over and beyond this Michaelmas as is coming, and there’s the hay on the ground yet.” Gilmore, who was very patient, assured him that he had no wish to allude to rent; that there should be no question of rent even when the day came, if at that time money was scarce. But would it not be better that the mill, at least, should be put in order?

“Indeed it will, Squire,” said Mrs. Brattle. “It is the idleness that is killing him.”

“Hold your jabbering tongue,” said the miller, turning round upon her fiercely. “Who asked you? I will see to it myself, Squire, to-morrow or next day.”

After two or three further days of inaction at the mill the Squire came again, bringing the parson with him; and they did manage to arrange between them that the repairs should be at once continued. The mill should be completed; but the house should be left till next summer. As to Brattle himself, when he had been once persuaded to yield the point, he did not care how much they pulled down, or how much they built up. “Do it as you will,” he said; “I ain’t nobody now. The women drives me about my own house as if I hadn’t a’most no business there.” And so the

hammers and trowels were heard again; and old Brattle would sit perfectly silent, gazing at the men as they worked. Once, as he saw two men and a boy shifting a ladder, he turned round, with a little chuckle to his wife, and said, "Sam 'd 'a see'd hisself d—d, afore he'd 'a asked another chap to help him with such a job as that."

As Mrs. Brattle told Mrs. Fenwick afterwards, he had one of the two erring children in his thoughts morning, noon, and night. "When I tell 'un of George"—who was the farmer near Fordingbridge,— "and of Mrs. Jay,"—who was the ironmonger's wife at Warminster,— "he won't take any comfort in them," said Mrs. Brattle. "I don't think he cares for them, just because they can hold their own heads up."

At the end of three weeks the Grinder was still missing; and others besides Mr. Jones, the attorney, were beginning to say that Sam Brattle should be let out of prison. Mr. Fenwick was clearly of opinion that he should not be detained, if bail could be forthcoming. The Squire was more cautious, and said that it might well be that his escape would render it impossible for the police even to get on the track of the real murderers. "No doubt, he knows more than he has told," said Gilmore, "and will probably tell it at last. If he be let out, he will tell nothing." The police were all of opinion that Sam had been present at the murder, and that he should be kept in custody till he was tried. They were very sharp in their manœuvres to get evidence against him. His boot, they had said, fitted a footstep which had been found in the mud in the farm-yard. The measure had been taken on the Sunday. That was evidence. Then they examined Agnes Pope over and over again, and

extracted from the poor girl an admission that she loved Sam better than anything in the whole wide world. If he were to be in prison, she would not object to going to prison with him. If he were to be hung, she would wish to be hung with him. She had no secret she would not tell him. But, as a matter of fact,—so she swore over and over again,—she had never told him a word about old Trumbull's box. She did not think she had ever told any one; but she would swear on her death-bed that she had never told Sam Brattle. The head constable declared that he had never met a more stubborn or a more artful young woman. Sir Thomas Charleys was clearly of opinion that no bail should be accepted. Another week of remand was granted with the understanding that, if nothing of importance was elicited by that time, and if neither of the other two suspected men were then in custody, Sam should be allowed to go at large upon bail—a good, substantial bail, himself in £400, and his bailsmen in £200 each.

“Who'll be his bailsmen?” said the Squire, coming away with his friend the parson from Heytesbury.

“There will be no difficulty about that, I should say.”

“But who will they be,—his father for one?”

“His brother George, and Jay, at Warminster, who married his sister,” said the parson.

“I doubt them both,” said the Squire.

“He sha'n't want for bail. I'll be one myself, sooner. He shall have bail. If there's any difficulty, Jones shall bail him; and I'll see Jones safe through it. He sha'n't be persecuted in that way.”

“I don't think anybody has attempted to persecute him, Frank.”

“He will be persecuted if his own brothers won't come forward to help him. It isn't that they have looked into the matter, and that they think him guilty; but that they go just the way they're told to go, like sheep. The more I think of it, the more I feel that he had nothing to do with the murder.”

“I never knew a man change his opinion so often as you do,” said Gilmore.

During three weeks the visits made by Head Constable Toffy to the cottage in which Mrs. Burrows lived were much more frequent than were agreeable to that lady. This cottage was about four miles from Devizes, and on the edge of a common, about half a mile from the high road which leads from that town to Marlborough. There is, or was a year or two back, a considerable extent of unenclosed land thereabouts, and on a spot called Pycroft Common there was a small collection of cottages, sufficient to constitute a hamlet of the smallest class. There was no house there of greater pretensions than the very small beershop which provided for the conviviality of the Pycroftians; and of other shops there was none, save a baker's, the owner of which seldom had much bread to sell, and the establishment for brandy-balls, which was kept by Mrs. Burrows. The inhabitants were chiefly labouring men, some of whom were in summer employed in brick making; and there was an idea abroad that Pycroft generally was not sustained by regular labour and sober industry. Rents, however, were paid for the cottages, or the cottagers would have been turned adrift; and Mrs. Burrows had lived in hers for five or six years, and was noted in the neighbourhood for her outward neatness and attention to decency. In the summer there were always half-a-dozen large sun-

flowers in the patch of ground called a garden, and there was a rose-tree, and a bush of honeysuckle over the door, and an alder stump in a corner, which would still put out leaves and bear berries. When Head Constable Toffy visited her there would be generally a few high words, for Mrs. Burrows was by no means unwilling to let it be known that she objected to morning calls from Mr. Toffy.

It has been already said that at this time Mrs. Burrows did not live alone. Residing with her was a young woman, who was believed by Mr. Toffy to be the wife of Richard Burrows, alias the Grinder. On his first visit to Pycroft no doubt, Mr. Toffy was mainly anxious to ascertain whether anything was known by the old woman as to her son's whereabouts, but the second, third, and fourth visits were made rather to the younger than to the older woman. Toffy had probably learned in his wide experience that a man of the Grinder's nature will generally place more reliance on a young woman than on an old; and that the young woman will, nevertheless, be more likely to betray confidence than the older;—partly from indiscretion, and partly, alas! from treachery. But, if the presumed Mrs. Burrows, junior, knew aught of the Grinder's present doings, she was neither indiscreet nor treacherous. Mr. Toffy could get nothing from her. She was sickly, weak, sullen, and silent. "She didn't think it was her business to say where she had been living before she came to Pycroft. She hadn't been living with any husband, and had got no husband that she knew of. If she had she wasn't going to say so. She hadn't any children, and she didn't know what business he had to ask her. She came from Lunnon. At any rate, she

came from there last, and she didn't know what business he had to ask her where she came from. What business was it of his to be asking what her name was? Her name was Anne Burrows, if he liked to call her so. She wouldn't answer him any more questions. No; she wouldn't say what her name was before she was married."

Mr. Toffy had his reasons for interrogating this poor woman, but he did not for a while let any one know what those reasons were. He could not, however, obtain more information than what is contained in the answers above given, which were, for the most part, true. Neither the mother nor the younger woman knew where was to be found, at the present moment, that hero of adventure who was called the Grinder, and all the police of Wiltshire began to fear that they were about to be outwitted.

"You never were at Bullhampton with your husband, I suppose?" asked Mr. Toffy.

"Never," said the supposed Grinder's wife; "but what does it matter to you where I was?"

"Don't answer him never another word," said old Mrs. Burrows.

"I won't," said the other.

"Were you ever at Bullhampton at all?" asked Mr. Toffy.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said the younger woman.

"I think you must have been there once," said Mr. Toffy.

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Mrs. Burrows, senior. "Drat you; get out of this. You ain't no right here, and you shan't stay here. If you ain't out of this, I'll brain yer. I don't care for perlice nor anything. We ain't done nothing. If he did

smash the gen'leman's head, we didn't do it; neither she nor me."

"All the same, I think that Mrs. Burrows has been at Bullhampton," said the policeman.

Not another word after this was said by Mrs. Burrows, junior, so called, and Constable Toffy soon took his departure. He was convinced, at any rate, of this;—that wherever the murderers might be, the man or men who had joined Sam Brattle in the murder,—for of Sam's guilt he was quite convinced,—neither the mother, nor the so-called wife knew of their whereabouts. He, in his heart, condemned the constabulary of Warwickshire, of Gloucestershire, of Worcester-shire, and of Somersetshire, because the Grinder was not taken. Especially he condemned the constabulary of Warwickshire, feeling almost sure that the Grinder was in Birmingham. If the constabulary in those counties would only do their duty as they in Wiltshire did theirs, the Grinder and his associates would soon be taken. But by him nothing further could be learned, and Mr. Toffy left Pycroft Common with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS LOWTHER ASKS FOR ADVICE

ALL these searchings for the murderers of Mr. Trumbull, and these remandings of Sam Brattle, took place in the month of September, and during the same month the energy of other men of law was very keenly at work on a widely different subject. Could Messrs. Block and Curling assure Captain Marrable that a portion of his inheritance would be saved for him, or had that graceless father of his in very truth seized upon it all? There was no shadow of doubt but that if aught was spared, it had not been spared through any delicacy on the part of the Colonel. The Colonel had gone to work, paying creditors who were clamorous against him, the moment he had got his hand upon the money, and had gone to work also gambling, and had made assignments of money, and done his very best to spend the whole. But there was a question whether a certain sum of £5000, which seemed to have got into the hands of a certain lady who protested that she wanted it very badly, might not be saved. Messrs. Block and Curling thought that it might, but were by no means certain. It probably might be done, if the Captain would consent to bring the matter before a jury; in which case the whole story of the father's iniquity must, of course, be proved. Or it might be that by threatening to do this, the lady's friends would relax their grasp on receiving a certain present out of the money.

"We would offer them £50, and perhaps they would take £500," said Messrs. Block and Curling.

All this irritated the Captain. He was intensely averse to any law proceedings by which the story should be made public.

"I won't pretend that it is on my father's account," said he to his uncle. Parson John shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head, meaning to imply that it certainly was a bad case, but that as Colonel Marrable was a Marrable, he ought to be spared, if possible. "It is on my own account," continued the Captain, "and partly, perhaps, on that of the family. I would endure anything rather than have the filth of the transaction flooded through the newspapers. I should never be able to join my mess again if I did that."

"Then you'd better let Block and Curling compromise and get what they can," said Parson John, with an indifferent and provoking tone, which clearly indicated that he would regard the matter when so settled as one arranged amicably and pleasantly between all the parties. His uncle's calmness and absence of horror at the thing that had been done was very grievous to Captain Marrable.

"Poor Wat!" the parson had once said, speaking of his wicked brother; "he never could keep two shillings together. It's ever so long since I had to determine that nothing on earth should induce me to let him have half-a-crown. I must say that he did not take it amiss when I told him."

"Why should he have wanted half-a-crown from you?"

"He was always one of those thirsty sandbags that swallow small drops and large alike. He got £10,000

out of poor Gregory about the time that you were born, and Gregory is fretting about it yet."

"What kills me is the disgrace of it," said the young man.

"It would be disagreeable to have it in the newspapers," said Parson John. "And then he was such a pleasant fellow, and so handsome. I always enjoyed his society when once I had buttoned up my breeches' pocket."

Yet this man was a clergyman, preaching honesty and moral conduct, and living fairly well up to his preaching, too, as far as he himself was concerned! The Captain almost thought that the earth and skies should be brought together, and the clouds clap with thunder, and the mountains be riven in twain at the very mention of his father's wickedness. But then sins committed against oneself are so much more sinful than any other sins.

The Captain had much more sympathetic listeners in Uphill Lane; not that either of the ladies there spoke severely against his father, but that they entered more cordially into his own distresses. If he could save even £4500 out of the wreck, the interest on the money would enable him to live at home in his regiment. If he could get £4000 he would do it.

"With £150 per annum," he said, "I could just hold my head up and get along. I should have to give up all manner of things; but I would never cry about that."

Then, again, he would declare that the one thing necessary for his happiness was, that he should get the whole business of the money off his mind. "If I could have it settled, and have done with it," said he, "I should be at ease."

"Quite right, my dear," said the old lady. "My idea about money is this, that whether you have much or little, you should make your arrangements so that it be no matter of thought to you. Your money should be just like counters at a round game with children, and should mean nothing. It comes to that when you once get things on a proper footing."

They thus became very intimate, the two ladies in Uphill Lane and the Captain from his uncle's parsonage in the Lowtown; and the intimacy on his part was quite as strong with the younger as with the elder relative,—quite as strong, and no doubt more pleasant. They walked together constantly, as cousins may walk, and they discussed every turn that took place in the correspondence with Messrs. Block and Curling. Captain Marrable had come to his uncle's house for a week or ten days, but had been pressed to remain on till this business should be concluded. His leave of absence lasted till the end of November, and might be prolonged if he intended to return to India. "Stay here till the end of November," said Parson John. "What's the use of spending your money at a London hotel? Only don't fall in love with cousin Mary."

So the Captain did stay, obeying one half of his uncle's advice, and promising obedience to the other half.

Aunt Sarah also had her fears about the falling in love, and spoke a prudent word to Mary. "Mary, dear," she said, "you and Walter are as loving as turtle doves."

"I do like him so much," said Mary, boldly.

"So do I, my dear. He is a gentleman, and clever, and, upon the whole, he bears a great injury well. I

like him. But I don't think people ought to fall in love when there is a strong reason against it."

"Certainly not, if they can help it."

"Pshaw! That's missish nonsense, Mary, and you know it. If a girl were to tell me she fell in love because she couldn't help it, I should tell her that she wasn't worth any man's love."

"But what's your reason, Aunt Sarah?"

"Because it wouldn't suit Mr. Gilmore."

"I am not bound to suit Mr. Gilmore."

"I don't know about that. And then, too, it would not suit Walter himself. How could he marry a wife when he has just been robbed of all his fortune?"

"But I have not the slightest idea of falling in love with him: In spite of what I said, I do hope that I can help it. And then I feel to him just as though he were my brother. I've got almost to know what it would be to have a brother."

In this Miss Lowther was probably wrong. She had now known her cousin for just a month. A month is quite long enough to realise the pleasure of a new lover, but it may be doubted whether the intimacy of a brother does not take a very much longer period for its creation.

"I think if I were you," said Miss Marrable, after a pause, "that I would tell him about Mr. Gilmore."

"Would you, Aunt Sarah?"

"I think I would. If he were really your brother you would tell him."

It was probably the case, that when Miss Marrable gave this advice, her opinion of Mr. Gilmore's success was greater than the circumstances warranted. Though there had been much said between the aunt and her niece about Mr. Gilmore and his offers, Mary had never

been able quite to explain her own thoughts and feelings. She herself did not believe that she could be brought to accept him, and was now stronger in that opinion than ever. But were she to say so in language that would convince her aunt, her aunt would no doubt ask her, why then had she left the man in doubt? Though she knew that at every moment in which she had been called upon to act, she had struggled to do right, yet there hung over her a half-conviction that she had been weak, and almost selfish. Her dearest friends wrote to her and spoke to her as though she would certainly take Mr. Gilmore at last. Janet Fenwick wrote of it in her letters as of a thing almost fixed; and Aunt Sarah certainly lived as though she expected it. And yet Mary was very nearly sure that it could not be so. Would it not be better that she should write to Mr. Gilmore at once, and not wait till the expiration of the weary six months which he had specified as the time at the end of which he might renew his proposals? Had Aunt Sarah known all this,—had she been aware how very near Mary was to the writing of such a letter,—she would not probably have suggested that her niece should tell her cousin anything about Mr. Gilmore. She did not think that the telling of the tale would make Cousin Walter understand that he should not allow himself to become an interloper; but the tale, if told as Mary would tell it, might have a very different effect.

Nevertheless, Mary thought that she would tell it. It would be so nice to consult a brother! It would be so pleasant to discuss the matter with some one that would sympathise with her,—with some one who would not wish to drive her into Mr. Gilmore's arms simply because Mr. Gilmore was an excellent gentleman, with

a snug property! Even from Janet Fenwick, whom she loved dearly, she had never succeeded in getting the sort of sympathy that she wanted. Janet was the best friend in the world,—was actuated in this matter simply by a desire to do a good turn to two people whom she loved. But there was no sympathy between her and Mary in the matter.

“Marry him,” said Janet, “and you will adore him afterwards.”

“I want to adore him first,” said Mary.

So she resolved that she would tell Walter Marrable what was her position. They were again down on the banks of the Lurwell, sitting together on a slope which had been made to support some hundred yards of a canal, where the river itself rippled down a slightly rapid fall. They were seated between the canal and the river, with their feet towards the latter, and Walter Marrable was just lighting a cigar. It was very easy to bring the conversation round to the affairs of Bullhampton, as Sam was still in prison, and Janet’s letters were full of the mystery which shrouded the murder of Mr. Trumbull.

“By the bye,” said she, “I have something to tell you about Mr. Gilmore.”

“Tell away,” said he, as he turned the cigar round in his mouth, to complete the lighting of the edges in the wind.

“Ah, but I shan’t, unless you will interest yourself. What I am going to tell you ought to interest you.”

“He has made you a proposal of marriage?”

“Yes.”

“I knew it.”

“How could you know it? Nobody has told you.”

“I felt sure of it from the way in which you speak

of him. But I thought also that you had refused him. Perhaps I was wrong there?"

"No."

"You have refused him?"

"Yes."

"I don't see that there is very much of a story to be told, Mary."

"Don't be so unkind, Walter. There is a story, and one that troubles me. If it were not so I should not have proposed to tell you. I thought that you would give me advice, and tell me what I ought to do."

"But if you have refused him, you have done so, —no doubt rightly,—without my advice; and I am too late in the field to be of any service."

"You must let me tell my own story, and you must be good to me while I do so. I think I shouldn't tell you if I hadn't almost made up my mind; but I shan't tell you which way, and you must advise me. In the first place, though I did refuse him, the matter is still open, and he is to ask me again, if he pleases."

"He has your permission for that?"

"Well,—yes. I hope it wasn't wrong. I did so try to be right."

"I do not say you were wrong."

"I like him so much, and think him so good, and do really feel that his affection is so great an honour to me, that I could not answer him as though I were quite indifferent to him."

"At any rate, he is to come again?"

"If he pleases."

"Does he really love you?"

"How am I to say? But that is missish and untrue. I am sure he loves me."

"So that he will grieve to lose you?"

"I know he will grieve. I ought not to say so. But I know he will."

"You ought to tell the truth, as you believe it. And you yourself,—do you love him?"

"I don't know. I do love him; but if I heard he was going to marry another girl to-morrow it would make me very happy."

"Then you can't love him?"

"I feel as though I should think the same of any man who wanted to marry me. But let me go on with my story. Everybody I care for wishes me to take him. I know that Aunt Sarah feels quite sure that I shall at last, and that she thinks I ought to do so at once. My friend, Janet Fenwick, cannot understand why I should hesitate, and only forgives me because she is sure that it will come right, in her way, some day. Mr. Fenwick is just the same, and will always talk to me as though it were my fate to live at Bullhampton all my life."

"Is not Bullhampton a nice place?"

"Very nice; I love the place."

"And Mr. Gilmore is rich?"

"He is quite rich enough. Fancy my inquiring about that, with just £1200 for my fortune."

"Then why, in God's name, don't you accept him?"

"You think I ought?"

"Answer my question;—why do you not?"

"Because—I do not love him—as I should hope to love my husband."

After this Captain Marrable, who had been looking her full in the face while he had been asking these questions, turned somewhat away from her, as though the conversation were over. She remained motionless,

and was minded so to remain till he should tell her that it was time to move, that they might return home. He had given her no advice; but she presumed she was to take what had passed as the expression of his opinion that it was her duty to accept an offer so favourable and so satisfactory to the family. At any rate, she would say nothing more on the subject till he should address her. Though she loved him dearly as her cousin, yet she was, in some slight degree, afraid of him. And now she was not sure but that he was expressing towards her, by his anger, some amount of displeasure at her weakness and inconsistency. After a while he turned round suddenly, and took her by the hand.

"Well, Mary!" he said.

"Well, Walter!"

"What do you mean to do, after all?"

"What ought I to do?"

"What ought you to do? You know what you ought to do. Would you marry a man for whom you have no more regard than you have for this stick, simply because he is persistent in asking you? No more than you have for this stick, Mary. What sort of a feeling must it be, when you say that you would willingly see him married to any other girl to-morrow? Can that be love?"

"I have never loved any one better."

"And never will?"

"How can I say? It seems to me that I haven't got the feeling that other girls have. I want some one to love me;—I do. I own that. I want to be *first* with some one; but I have never found the one yet that I cared for."

"You had better wait till you find him," said he,

raising himself up on his arm. "Come, let us get up and go home. You have asked me for my advice, and I have given it you. Do not throw yourself away upon a man because other people ask you, and because you think you might as well oblige them and oblige him. If you do, you will soon live to repent it. What would you do, if after marrying this man you found there was some one you could love?"

"I do not think it would come to that, Walter."

"How can you tell? How can you prevent its coming to that, except by loving the man you do marry? You don't care two straws for Mr. Gilmore; and I cannot understand how you can have the courage to think of becoming his wife. Let us go home. You have asked my advice, and you've got it. If you do not take it, I will endeavour to forget that I gave it you."

Of course she would take it. She did not tell him so then; but, of course, he should guide her. With how much more accuracy, with how much more delicacy of feeling had he understood her position, than had her other friends! He had sympathised with her at a word. He spoke to her sternly, severely, almost cruelly. But it was thus that she had longed to be spoken to by some one who would care enough for her, would take sufficient interest in her, to be at the trouble so to advise her. She would trust him as a brother, and his words should be sweet to her, were they ever so severe.

They walked together home in silence, and his very manner was stern to her; but it might be just thus that a loving brother would carry himself who had counselled his sister wisely, and had not as yet been assured that his counsel would be taken.

"Walter," she said, as they neared the town, "I hope you have no doubt about it."

"Doubt about what, Mary?"

"It is quite a matter of course that I shall do as you tell me."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARQUIS OF TROWBRIDGE

By the end of September it had come to be pretty well understood that Sam Brattle must be allowed to go out of prison, unless something in the shape of fresh evidence should be brought up on the next Tuesday. There had arisen a very strong feeling in the county on the subject;—a Brattle feeling, and an anti-Brattle feeling. It might have been called a Bullhampton feeling and an anti-Bullhampton feeling, were it not that the biggest man concerned in Bullhampton, with certain of his hangers-on and dependents, were very clearly of opinion that Sam Brattle had committed the murder, and that he should be kept in prison till the period for hanging him might come round. This very big person was the Marquis of Trowbridge, under whom poor Farmer Trumbull had held his land, and who now seemed to think that a murder committed on one of his tenants was almost as bad as insult to himself. He felt personally angry with Bullhampton, had ideas of stopping his charities to the parish, and did resolve, then and there, that he would have nothing to do with a subscription for the repair of the church, at any rate for the next three years. In making up his mind on which subject he was, perhaps, a little influenced by the opinions and narratives of Mr. Puddleham, the Methodist minister in the village.

It was not only that Mr. Trumbull had been murdered. So great and wise a man as Lord Trowbridge would,

no doubt, know very well, that in a free country, such as England, a man could not be specially protected from the hands of murderers, or others, by the fact of his being a tenant, or dependent,—by his being in some sort the possession of a great nobleman. The Marquis's people were all expected to vote for his candidates, and would soon have ceased to be the Marquis's people had they failed to do so. They were constrained, also in many respects, by the terms of their very short leases. They could not kill a head of game on their farms. They could not sell their own hay off the land, nor, indeed, any produce other than their corn or cattle. They were compelled to crop their land in certain rotation; and could take no other lands than those held under the Marquis without his leave. In return for all this, they became the Marquis's people. Each tenant shook hands with the Marquis perhaps once in three years; and twice a year was allowed to get drunk at the Marquis's expense—if such was his taste—provided that he had paid his rent. If the duties were heavy, the privileges were great. So the Marquis himself felt; and he knew that a mantle of security, of a certain thickness, was spread upon the shoulders of each of his people by reason of the tenure which bound them together. But he did not conceive that this mantle would be proof against the bullet of the ordinary assassin, or the hammer of the outside ruffian. But here the case was very different. The hammer had been the hammer of no outside ruffian. To the best of his lordship's belief,—and in that belief he was supported by the constabulary of the whole county,—the hammer had been wielded by a man of Bullhampton,—had been wielded against his tenant by the son of "a person who holds land under a gentle-

man who has some property in the parish." It was thus the Marquis was accustomed to speak of his neighbour, Mr. Gilmore, who, in the Marquis's eyes, was a man not big enough to have his tenants called his people. That such a man as Sam Brattle should have murdered such a one as Mr. Trumbull, was to the Marquis an insult rather than an injury; and now it was to be enhanced by the release of the man from prison, and that by order of a bench of magistrates on which Mr. Gilmore sat!

And there was more in it even than all this. It was very well known at Turnover Park,—the seat of Lord Trowbridge, near Westbury,—that Mr. Gilmore, the gentleman who held property in his lordship's parish of Bullhampton, and Mr. Fenwick, who was vicar of the same, were another Damon and Pythias. Now the ladies at Turnover, who were much devoted to the Low Church, had heard and doubtless believed, that our friend, Mr. Fenwick, was little better than an infidel. When first he had come into the county, they had been very anxious to make him out to be a High Churchman, and a story or two about a cross and a candlestick were fabricated for their gratification. There was at that time the remnant of a great fight going on between the Trowbridge people and another great family in the neighbourhood on this subject; and it would have suited the Ladies Stowte,—John Augustus Stowte was the Marquis of Trowbridge,—to have enlisted our parson among their enemies of this class; but the accusation fell so plump to the ground, was so impossible of support, that they were obliged to content themselves with knowing that Mr. Fenwick was— an infidel! To do the Marquis justice, we must declare that he would not have troubled himself on this score,

if Mr. Fenwick would have submitted himself to become one of his people. The Marquis was master at home, and the Ladies Sophie and Carolina would have been proud to entertain Mr. Fenwick by the week together at Turnover, had he been willing, infidel or believer, to join that faction. But he never joined that faction, and he was not only the bosom friend of the "gentleman who owned some land in the parish;" but he was twice more rebellious than that gentleman himself. He had contradicted the Marquis flat to his face,—so the Marquis said himself,—when they met once about some business in the parish; and again, when, in the Vicar's early days in Bullhampton, some gathering for school-festival purposes was made in the great home field behind Farmer Trumbull's house, Mrs. Fenwick misbehaved herself egregiously.

"Upon my word, she patronised us," said Lady Sophie, laughing. "She did, indeed! And you know what she was. Her father was just a common builder at Loring, who made some money by a speculation in bricks and mortar."

When Lady Sophie said this she was, no doubt, ignorant of the fact that Mr. Balfour had been the younger son of a family much more ancient than her own; that he had taken a double-first at Oxford, had been a member of half the learned societies in Europe, and had belonged to two or three of the best clubs in London.

From all this it will be seen that the Marquis of Trowbridge would be disposed to think ill of whatever might be done in regard to the murder by the Gilmore-Fenwick party in the parish. And then there were tales about for which there was perhaps some foundation, that the Vicar and the murderer had been very

dear friends. It was certainly believed at Turnover that the Vicar and Sam Brattle had for years past spent the best part of their Sundays fishing together. There were tales of rat-killing matches in which they had been engaged,—originating in the undeniable fact of a certain campaign against rats at the mill, in which the Vicar had taken an ardent part. Undoubtedly the destruction of vermin, and, in regard to one species, its preservation for the sake of destruction,—and the catching of fish,—and the shooting of birds,—were things lovely in the Vicar's eyes. He, perhaps, did let his pastoral dignity go a little by the board, when he and Sam stooped together, each with a ferret in his hand, grovelling in the dust to get at certain rat-advantages in the mill. Gilmore, who had seen it, had told him of this. "I understand it all, old fellow," Fenwick had said to his friend, "and know very well I have got to choose between two things. I must be called a hypocrite, or else I must be one. I have no doubt that as years go on with me I shall see the advantage of choosing the latter." There were at that time frequent discussions between them on the same subject, for they were friends who could dare to discuss each other's modes of life; but the reader need not be troubled further now with this digression. The position which the Vicar held in the estimation of the Marquis of Trowbridge will probably be sufficiently well understood.

The family at Turnover Park would have thought it a great blessing to have had a clergyman at Bullhampton with whom they could have cordially co-operated; but, failing this, they had taken Mr. Puddleham, the Methodist minister, to their arms. From Mr. Puddleham they learned parish facts and parish fables,

which would never have reached them but for his assistance. Mr. Fenwick was well aware of this, and used to declare that he had no objection to it. He would protest that he could not see why Mr. Puddleham should not get along in the parish just as well as himself, he having, and meaning to keep to himself, the slight advantages of the parish church, the vicarage-house, and the small tithes. Of this he was quite sure, that Mr. Puddleham's religious teaching was better than none at all; and he was by no means convinced,—so he said,—that, for some of his parishioners, Mr. Puddleham was not a better teacher than he himself. He always shook hands with Mr. Puddleham, though Mr. Puddleham would never look him in the face, and was quite determined that Mr. Puddleham should not be a thorn in his side.

In this matter of Sam Brattle's imprisonment and now intended liberation, tidings from the parish were doubtless conveyed by Mr. Puddleham to Turnover,—probably not direct, but still in such a manner that the great people at Turnover knew to whom they were indebted. Now Mr. Gilmore had certainly, from the first, been by no means disposed to view favourably the circumstances attaching to Sam Brattle on that Saturday night. When the great blow fell on the Brattle family, his demeanour to them was changed, and he forgave the miller's contumacy; but he had always thought that Sam had been guilty. The parson had from the first regarded the question with great doubt, but, nevertheless, his opinion too had at first been averse to Sam. Even now, when he was so resolute that Sam should be released, he founded his demand, not on Sam's innocence, but on the absence of any evidence against him.

"He's entitled to fair play, Harry," he would say to Gilmore, "and he is not getting it, because there is a prejudice against him. You hear what that old ass, Sir Thomas, says."

"Sir Thomas is a very good magistrate."

"If he don't take care, he'll find himself in trouble for keeping the lad locked up without authority. Is there a jurymen in the country would find him guilty because he was lying in the old man's ditch a week before?" In this way Gilmore also became a favourer of Sam's claim to be released; and at last it came to be understood that on the next Tuesday he would be released, unless further evidence should be forthcoming.

And then it came to pass that a certain very remarkable meeting took place in the parish. Word was brought to Mr. Gilmore on Monday, the 5th October, that the Marquis of Trowbridge was to be at the Church Farm,—poor Trumbull's farm,—on that day at noon, and that his lordship thought that it might be expedient that he and Mr. Gilmore should meet on the occasion. There was no note, but the message was brought by Mr. Packer, a sub-agent, one of the Marquis's people, with whom Mr. Gilmore was very well acquainted.

"I'll walk down about that time, Packer," said Mr. Gilmore, "and shall be very happy to see his lordship."

Now the Marquis never sat as a magistrate at the Heytesbury bench, and had not been present on any of the occasions on which Sam had been examined; nor had Mr. Gilmore seen the Marquis since the murder,—nor, for the matter of that, for the last twelve months. Mr. Gilmore had just finished breakfast when the news was brought to him, and he thought he might

as well walk down and see Fenwick first. His interview with the parson ended in a promise that he, Fenwick, would also look in at the farm.

At twelve o'clock the Marquis was seated in the old farmer's arm-chair, in the old farmer's parlour. The house was dark and gloomy, never having been altogether opened since the murder. With the Marquis was Packer, who was standing, and the Marquis was pretending to cast his eye over one or two books which had been brought to him. He had been taken all over the house; had stood looking at the bed where the old man lay when he was attacked, as though he might possibly discover, if he looked long enough, something that would reveal the truth; had gazed awe-struck at the spot on which the body had been found, and had taken occasion to remark to himself that the house was a good deal out of order. The Marquis was a man nearer seventy than sixty, but very hale, and with few signs of age. He was short and plump, with hardly any beard on his face, and short grey hair, of which nothing could be seen when he wore his hat. His countenance would not have been bad, had not the weight of his marquisate always been there; nor would his heart have been bad, had it not been similarly burdened. But he was a silly, weak, ignorant man, whose own capacity would hardly have procured bread for him in any trade or profession, had bread not been so adequately provided for him by his fathers before him.

"Mr. Gilmore said he would be here at twelve, Packer?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And it's past twelve now?"

"One minute, my lord."

Then the peer looked again at poor old Trumbull's books.

"I shall not wait, Packer."

"No, my lord."

"You had better tell them to put the horses to."

"Yes, my lord."

But just as Packer went out into the passage for the sake of giving the order he met Mr. Gilmore, and ushered him into the room.

"Ha! Mr. Gilmore; yes, I am very glad to see you, Mr. Gilmore;" and the Marquis came forward to shake hands with his visitor. "I thought it better that you and I should meet about this sad affair in the parish;—a very sad affair, indeed."

"It certainly is, Lord Trowbridge; and the mystery makes it more so."

"I suppose there is no real mystery, Mr. Gilmore? I suppose there can be no doubt that that unfortunate young man did,—did,—did bear a hand in it at least?"

"I think that there is very much doubt, my lord."

"Do you, indeed? I think there is none,—not the least. And all the police force are of the same opinion. I have considerable experiences of my own in these matters; but I should not venture, perhaps to express my opinion so confidently, if I were not backed by the police. You are aware, Mr. Gilmore, that the police are—very—seldom wrong?"

"I should be tempted to say that they are very seldom right—except when the circumstances are all under their noses."

"I must say I differ from you entirely, Mr. Gilmore. Now, in this case——" The Marquis was here interrupted by a knock at the door, and before the sum-

mons could be answered, the parson entered the room. And with the parson came Mr. Puddleham. The Marquis had thought that the parson might, perhaps, intrude; and Mr. Puddleham was in waiting as a make-weight, should he be wanting. When Mr. Fenwick had met the minister hanging about the farmyard, he had displayed not the slightest anger. If Mr. Puddleham chose to come in also, and make good his doing so before the Marquis, it was nothing to Mr. Fenwick. The great man looked up, as though he were very much startled and somewhat offended; but he did at last condescend to shake hands, first with one clergyman and then with the other, and to ask them to sit down. He explained that he had come over to make some personal inquiry into the melancholy matter, and then proceeded with his opinion respecting Sam Brattle. "From all that I can hear and see," said his lordship, "I fear there can be no doubt that this murder has been due to the malignity of a near neighbour."

"Do you mean the poor boy that is in prison, my lord?" asked the parson.

"Of course I do, Mr. Fenwick. The constabulary are of opinion——"

"We know that, Lord Trowbridge."

"Perhaps, Mr. Fenwick, you will allow me to express my own ideas. The constabulary, I say, are of opinion that there is no manner of doubt that he was one of those who broke into my tenant's house on that fatal night; and, as I was explaining to Mr. Gilmore when you did us the honour to join us, in the course of a long provincial experience I have seldom known the police to be in error."

"Why, Lord Trowbridge——!"

"If you please, Mr. Fenwick, I will go on. My

time here cannot be long, and I have a proposition which I am desirous of making to Mr. Gilmore, as a magistrate acting in this part of the county. Of course, it is not for me to animadvert upon what the magistrates may do at the bench to-morrow."

"I am sure your lordship would make no such animadversion," said Mr. Gilmore.

"I do not intend it, for many reasons. But I may go so far as to say that a demand for the young man's release will be made."

"He is to be released, I presume, as a matter of course," said the parson.

The Marquis made no allusion to this, but went on. "If that be done,—and I must say that I think no such step would be taken by the bench at Westbury,—whither will the young man betake himself?"

"Home to his father, of course," said the parson.

"Back into this parish, with his paramour, to murder more of my tenants."

"My lord, I cannot allow such an unjust statement to be made," said the parson.

"I wish to speak for one moment; and I wish it to be remembered that I am addressing myself especially to your neighbour, Mr. Gilmore, who has done me the honour of waiting upon me here at my request. I do not object to your presence, Mr. Fenwick, or to that of any other gentleman," and the Marquis bowed to Mr. Puddleham, who had stood by hitherto without speaking a word; "but, if you please, I must carry out the purpose that has brought me here. I shall think it very sad indeed, if this young man be allowed to take up his residence in the parish after what has taken place."

"His father has a house here," said Mr. Gilmore.

"I am aware of the fact," said the Marquis. "I believe that the young man's father holds a mill from you, and some few acres of land?"

"He has a very nice farm."

"So be it. We will not quarrel about terms. I believe there is no lease?—though, of course, that is no business of mine."

"I must say that it is not, my lord," said Mr. Gilmore, who was waxing wrothy and becoming very black about the brows.

"I have just said so; but I suppose you will admit that I have some interest in this parish? I presume that these two gentlemen, who are God's ministers here, will acknowledge that it is my duty, as the owner of the greater part of the parish, to interfere?"

"Certainly, my lord," said Mr. Puddleham.

Mr. Fenwick said nothing. He sat, or rather leant, against the edge of a table, and smiled. His brow was not black, like that of his friend; but Gilmore, who knew him, and who looked into his face, began to fear that the Marquis would be addressed before long in terms stronger than he himself, Mr. Gilmore, would approve.

"And when I remember," continued his lordship, "that the unfortunate man who has fallen a victim had been for nearly half a century a tenant of myself and of my family, and that he was foully murdered on my own property,—dragged from his bed in the middle of the night, and ruthlessly slaughtered in this very house in which I am sitting, and that this has been done in a parish of which I own, I think, something over two-thirds——"

"Two thousand and two acres out of two thousand nine hundred and ten," said Mr. Puddleham.

"I suppose so. Well, Mr. Puddleham, you need not have interrupted me."

"I beg pardon, my lord."

"What I mean to say is this, Mr. Gilmore,—that you should take steps to prevent that young man's return among our people. You should explain to the father that it cannot be allowed. From what I hear, it would be no loss if the whole family left the parish. I am told that one of the daughters is a—prostitute."

"It is too true, my lord," said Mr. Puddleham.

The parson turned round and looked at his colleague, but said nothing. It was one of the principles of his life that he wouldn't quarrel with Mr. Puddleham; and at the present moment he certainly did not wish to waste his anger on so weak an enemy.

"I think that you should look to this, Mr. Gilmore," said the Marquis, completing his harangue.

"I cannot conceive, my lord, what right you have to dictate to me in such a matter," said Mr. Gilmore.

"I have not dictated at all; I have simply expressed my opinion," said the Marquis.

"Now, my lord, will you allow me for a moment?" said Mr. Fenwick. "In the first place, if Sam Brattle could not find a home at the mill,—which I hope he will do for many a long year to come,—he should have one at the Vicarage."

"I dare say," said the Marquis.

Mr. Puddleham held up both hands.

"You might as well hold your tongue, Frank," said Gilmore.

"It is a matter on which I wish to say a word or two, Harry. I have been appealed to as one of God's ministers here, and I acknowledge my responsibility. I never in my life heard any proposition more cruel

or inhuman than that made by Lord Trowbridge. This young man is to be turned out because a tenant of his lordship has been murdered! He is to be adjudged to be guilty by us, without any trial, in the absence of all evidence, in opposition to the decision of the magistrates——”

“It is not in opposition to the magistrates, sir,” said the Marquis.

“And to be forbidden to return to his own home, simply because Lord Trowbridge thinks him guilty! My lord, his father’s house is his own, to entertain whom he may please, as much as is yours. And were I to suggest to you to turn out your daughters, it would be no worse an offence than your suggesting to Mr. Brattle that he should turn out his son.”

“My daughters!”

“Yes, your daughters, my lord.”

“How dare you mention my daughters?”

“The ladies, I am well aware, are all that is respectable. I have not the slightest wish that you should ill-use them. But if you desire that your family concerns should be treated with reserve and reticence, you had better learn to treat the family affairs of others in the same way.”

The Marquis by this time was on his feet, and was calling for Packer,—was calling for his carriage and horses,—was calling on the very gods to send down their thunder to punish such insolence as this. He had never heard of the like in all his experience. His daughters! And then there came across his dismayed mind an idea that his daughters had been put upon a par with that young murderer, Sam Brattle,—perhaps even on a par with something worse than this. And his daughters were such august persons,—old and ugly,

it is true, and almost dowerless in consequence of the nature of the family settlements and family expenditure. It was an injury and an insult that Mr. Fenwick should make the slightest allusion to his daughters; but to talk of them in such a way as this, as though they were mere ordinary human beings, was not to be endured! The Marquis had hitherto had his doubts, but now he was quite sure that Mr. Fenwick was an infidel. "And a very bad sort of infidel, too," as he said to Lady Carolina on his return home. "I never heard of such conduct in all my life," said Lord Trowbridge, walking down to his carriage. "Who can be surprised that there should be murderers and prostitutes in the parish?"

"My lord, they don't sit under me," said Mr. Puddleham.

"I don't care who they sit under," said his lordship.

As they walked away together, Mr. Fenwick had just a word to say to Mr. Puddleham. "My friend," he said, "you were quite right about his lordship's acres."

"Those are the numbers," said Mr. Puddleham.

"I mean that you were quite right to make the observation. Facts are always valuable, and I am sure Lord Trowbridge was obliged to you. But I think you were a little wrong as to another statement."

"What statement, Mr. Fenwick?"

"What you said about poor Carry Brattle. You don't know it as a fact."

"Everybody says so."

"How do you know she has not married, and become an honest woman?"

"It is possible, of course. Though as for that,—when a young woman has once gone astray——"

"As did Mary Magdalene, for instance!"

"Mr. Fenwick, it was a very bad case."

"And isn't my case very bad,—and yours? Are we not in a bad way,—unless we believe and repent? Have we not all so sinned as to deserve eternal punishment?"

"Certainly, Mr. Fenwick."

"Then there can't be much difference between her and us. She can't deserve more than eternal punishment. If she believes and repents, all her sins will be white as snow."

"Certainly, Mr. Fenwick."

"Then speak of her as you would of any other sister or brother,—not as a thing that must be always vile because she has fallen once. Women will so speak,—and other men. One sees something of a reason for it. But you and I, as Christian ministers, should never allow ourselves to speak so thoughtlessly of sinners. Good morning, Mr. Puddleham."

CHAPTER XVIII

BLANK PAPER

EARLY in October Captain Marrable was called up to town by letters from Messrs. Block and Curling, and according to promise wrote various letters to Mary Lowther, telling her of the manner in which his business progressed. All of these letters were shown to Aunt Sarah,—and would have been shown to Parson John were it not that Parson John declined to read them. But though the letters were purely cousinly,—just such letters as a brother might write,—yet Miss Marrable thought that they were dangerous. She did not say so; but she thought that they were dangerous. Of late Mary had spoken no word of Mr. Gilmore; and Aunt Sarah, through all this silence, was able to discover that Mr. Gilmore's prospects were not becoming brighter. Mary herself, having quite made up her mind that Mr. Gilmore's prospects, so far as she was concerned, were all over, could not decide how and when she should communicate the resolve to her lover. According to her present agreement with him, she was to write to him at once should she accept any other offer; and was to wait for six months if this should not be the case. Certainly, there was no rival in the field, and therefore she did not quite know whether she ought or ought not to write at once in her present circumstances of assured determination. She soon told herself that in this respect also she would go to her new-found brother for advice. She would ask him, and do

just as he might bid her. Had he not already proved how fit a person he was to give advice on such a subject?

After an absence of ten days he came home, and nothing could exceed Mary's anxiety as to the tidings which he should bring with him. She endeavoured not to be selfish about the matter; but she could not but acknowledge that, even as regarded herself, the difference between his going to India or staying at home was so great as to affect the whole colour of her life. There was, perhaps, something of the feeling of being subject to desertion about her, as she remembered that in giving up Mr. Gilmore she must also give up the Fenwicks. She could not hope to go to Bullhampton again, at least for many a long day. She would be very much alone if her new brother were to leave her now. On the morning after his arrival he came up to them at Uphill, and told them that the matter was almost settled. Messrs. Block and Curling had declared that it was as good as settled; the money would be saved, and there would be, out of the £20,000 which he had inherited, something over £4,000 for him; so that he need not return to India. He was in very high spirits, and did not speak a word of his father's iniquities.

"Oh, Walter, what a joy!" said Mary, with the tears streaming from her eyes.

He took her by both her hands, and kissed her forehead. At that moment Aunt Sarah was not in the room.

"I am so very, very happy," she said, pressing her little hands against his.

Why should he not kiss her? Was he not her brother? And then, before he went, she remembered

she had something special to tell him;—something to ask him. Would he not walk with her that evening? Of course he would walk with her.

“Mary dear,” said her aunt, putting her little arm round her niece’s waist, and embracing her, “don’t fall in love with Walter.”

“How can you say anything so foolish, Aunt Sarah?”

“It would be very foolish to do so.”

“You don’t understand how completely different it is. Do you think I could be so intimate with him as I am if anything of the kind were possible?”

“I do not know how that may be.”

“Do not begrudge it me because I have found a cousin that I can love almost as I would a brother. There has never been anybody yet for whom I could have that sort of feeling.”

Aunt Sarah, whatever she might think, had not the heart to repeat her caution; and Mary, quite happy and contented with herself, put on her hat to run down the hill and meet her cousin at the great gates of the Lowtown Rectory. Why should he be dragged up the hill, to escort a cousin down again? This arrangement had, therefore, been made between them.

For the first mile or two the talk was all about Messrs. Block and Curling and the money. Captain Marrable was so full of his own purposes, and so well contented that so much should be saved to him out of the fortune he had lost, that he had, perhaps, forgotten that Mary required more advice. But when they had come to the spot on which they had before sat, she bade him stop and seat himself.

“And now what is it?” he said, as he rolled himself comfortably close to her side. She told her story,

and explained her doubts, and asked for the revelations of his wisdom. "Are you quite sure about the propriety of this, Mary?" he said.

"The propriety of what, Walter?"

"Giving up a man who loves you so well, and who has so much to offer?"

"What was it you said yourself? Sure! Of course I am sure. I am quite sure. I do not love him. Did I not tell you that there could be no doubt after what you said?"

"I did not mean that my words should be so powerful."

"They were powerful; but, independently of that, I am quite sure now. If I could do it myself, I should be false to him. I know that I do not love him." He was not looking at her where he was lying, but was playing with a cigar-case which he had taken out, as though he were about to resume his smoking. But he did not open the case, or look towards her, or say a word to her. Two minutes had perhaps passed before she spoke again. "I suppose it would be best that I should write to him at once?"

"There is no one else, then, you care for, Mary?" he asked.

"No one," she said, as though the question were nothing.

"It is all blank paper with you?"

"Quite blank," she said, and laughed. "Do you know, I almost think it always will be blank."

"By G——! it is not blank with me," he said, springing up and jumping to his feet. She stared at him, not in the least understanding what he meant, not dreaming even that he was about to tell her his love secrets in reference to another. "I wonder what you

think I'm made of, Mary;—whether you imagine I have any affection to bestow?"

"I do not in the least understand."

"Look here, dear," and he knelt down beside her as he spoke, "it is simply this, that you have become to me more than all the world;—that I love you better than my own soul;—that your beauty and sweetness, and soft, darling touch, are everything to me. And then you come to me for advice! I can only give you one bit of advice now, Mary."

"And what is that?"

"Love me."

"I do love you."

"Ay, but love me and be my wife."

She had to think of it; but she knew from the first moment that the thinking of it was a delight to her. She did not quite understand at first that her chosen brother might become her lover, with no other feeling than that of joy and triumph; and yet there was a consciousness that no other answer but one was possible. In the first place, to refuse him anything, asked in love, would be impossible. She could not say No to him. She had struggled often in reference to Mr. Gilmore, and had found it impossible to say Yes. There was now the same sort of impossibility in regard to the No. She couldn't blacken herself with such a lie. And yet, though she was sure of this, she was so astounded by his declaration, so carried off her legs by the alteration in her position, so hard at work within herself with her new endeavour to change the aspect in which she must look at the man, that she could not even bring herself to think of answering him. If he would only sit down near her for awhile,—very near,—and not speak to her, she thought that she would be happy. Everything else

was forgotten. Aunt Sarah's caution, Janet Fenwick's anger, poor Gilmore's sorrow,—of all these she thought not at all, or only allowed her mind to dwell on them as surrounding trifles, of which it would be necessary that she, that they—they two who were now all in all to each other—must dispose, as they must, also, of questions of income, and such like little things. She was without a doubt. The man was her master, and had her in his keeping, and of course she would obey him. But she must settle her voice, and let her pulses become calm, and remember herself before she could tell him so. "Sit down again, Walter," she said at last.

"Why should I sit?"

"Because I ask you. Sit down, Walter."

"No. I understand how wise you will be, and how cold, and I understand, too, what a fool I have been."

"Walter, will you not come when I ask you?"

"Why should I sit?"

"That I may try to tell you how dearly I love you."

He did not sit, but he threw himself at her feet, and buried his face upon her lap. There were but few more words spoken then. When it comes to this, that a pair of lovers are content to sit and rub their feathers together like two birds, there is not much more need of talking. Before they had arisen, her fingers had been playing through his curly hair, and he had kissed her lips and cheeks as well as her forehead. She had begun to feel what it was to have a lover and to love him. She could already talk to him almost as though he were a part of herself, could whisper to him little words of nonsense, could feel that everything of hers was his, and everything of his was hers. She knew more clearly now even than she had done before that

she had never loved Mr. Gilmore, and never could have loved him. And that other doubt had been solved for her. "Do you know," she had said, not yet an hour ago, "that I think it always will be blank." And now every spot of the canvas was covered.

"We must go home now," she said at last.

"And tell Aunt Sarah," he replied, laughing.

"Yes, and tell Aunt Sarah;—but not to-night. I can do nothing to-night but think about it. Oh, Walter, I am so happy!"

CHAPTER XIX

SAM BRATTLE RETURNS HOME

THE Tuesday's magistrates' meeting had come off at Heytesbury, and Sam Brattle had been discharged. Mr. Jones had on this occasion indignantly demanded that his client should be set free without bail; but to this the magistrates would not assent. The attorney attempted to demonstrate to them that they could not require bail for the reappearance of an accused person, when that accused person was discharged simply because there was no evidence against him. But to this exposition of the law Sir Thomas and his brother magistrates would not listen. "If the other persons should at last be taken, and Brattle should not then be forthcoming, justice would suffer," said Sir Thomas. County magistrates, as a rule, are more conspicuous for common sense and good instincts than for sound law; and Mr. Jones may, perhaps, have been right in his view of the case. Nevertheless bail was demanded, and was not forthcoming without considerable trouble. Mr. Jay, the ironmonger at Warminster, declined. When spoken to on the subject by Mr. Fenwick, he declared that the feeling among the gentry was so strong against his brother-in-law, that he could not bring himself to put himself forward. He couldn't do it for the sake of his family. When Fenwick promised to make good the money risk, Jay declared that the difficulty did not lie there. "There's the Marquis, and Sir Thomas, and Squire Greenthorne, and our parson, all say, sir, as how he shouldn't be bailed at all. And then,

sir, if one has a misfortune belonging to one, one doesn't want to flaunt it in everybody's face, sir." And there was trouble, too, with George Brattle from Ford-
ingbridge. George Brattle was a prudent, hard-headed, hard-working man, not troubled with much sentiment, and caring very little what any one could say of him as long as his rent was paid; but he had taken it into his head that Sam was guilty; that he was at any rate a thoroughly bad fellow who should be turned out of the Brattle nest, and that no kindness was due to him. With the farmer, however, Mr. Fenwick did prevail, and then the parson became the other bondsman himself. He had been strongly advised,—by Gilmore, by Gilmore's uncle, the prebendary at Salisbury, and by others,—not to put himself forward in this position. The favour which he had shown to the young man had not borne good results either for the young man or for himself; and it would be unwise,—so said his friends,—to subject his own name to more remark than was necessary. He had so far assented as to promise not to come forward if other bailsmen could be procured. But, when the difficulty came, he offered himself, and was, of necessity, accepted.

When Sam was released, he was like a caged animal who, when liberty is first offered to him, does not know how to use it. He looked about him in the hall of the Court House, and did not at first seem disposed to leave it. The constable had asked him whether he had means of getting home, to which he replied, that "it wasn't no more than a walk." Dinner was offered to him by the constable, but this he refused, and then he stood glaring about him. After a while Gilmore and Fenwick came up to him, and the Squire was the first to speak. "Brattle," he said, "I hope you will

now go home, and remain there working with your father for the present."

"I don't know nothing about that," said the lad, not deigning to look at the Squire.

"Sam, pray go home at once," said the parson. "We have done what we could for you, and you should not oppose us."

"Mr. Fenwick, if you tells me to go to—to—to,"—he was going to mention some very bad place, but was restrained by the parson's presence,—“if you tells me to go anywhere, I'll go.”

"That's right. Then I tell you to go to the mill."

"I don't know as father'll let me in," said he, almost breaking into sobs as he spoke.

"That he will, heartily. Do you tell him that you had a word or two with me here, and that I'll come up and call on him to-morrow." Then he put his hand into his pocket, and whispering something, offered the lad money. But Sam turned away, and shook his head, and walked off. "I don't believe that that fellow had any more to do with it than you or I," said Fenwick.

"I don't know what to believe," said Gilmore. "Have you heard that the Marquis is in town? Green-thorne just told me so."

"Then I had better get out of it, for Heytesbury isn't big enough for the two of us. Come, you've done here, and we might as well jog home."

Gilmore dined at the Vicarage that evening, and of course the day's work was discussed. The quarrel, too, which had taken place at the farmhouse had only yet been in part described to Mrs. Fenwick. "Do you know I feel half triumphant and half frightened," Mrs. Fenwick said to the Squire. "I know that the Marquis

is an old fool, imperious, conceited, and altogether unendurable when he attempts to interfere. And yet I have a kind of feeling that because he is a Marquis, and because he owns two thousand and so many acres in the parish, and because he lives at Turnover Park, one ought to hold him in awe."

"Frank didn't hold him in awe yesterday," said the Squire.

"He holds nothing in awe," said the wife.

"You wrong me there, Janet. I hold you in great awe, and every lady in Wiltshire more or less;—and I think I may say every woman. And I would hold him in a sort of awe, too, if he didn't drive me beyond myself by his mixture of folly and pride."

"He can do us a great deal of mischief, you know," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"What he can do, he will do," said the parson. "He even gave me a bad name, no doubt; but I fancy he was generous enough to me in that way before yesterday. He will now declare that I am the Evil One himself, and people won't believe that. A continued persistent enmity, always at work, but kept within moderate bounds, is more dangerous now-a-days, than a hot fever of revengeful wrath. The Marquis can't send out his men-at-arms and have me knocked on the head, or cast into a dungeon. He can only throw mud at me, and the more he throws at once, the less will reach me."

As to Sam, they were agreed that, whether he were innocent or guilty, the old miller should be induced to regard him as innocent, as far as their joint exertion in that direction might avail.

"He is innocent before the law till he has been proved to be guilty," said the Squire.

"Then of course there can be nothing wrong in telling his father that he is innocent," said the lady.

The Squire did not quite admit this, and the parson smiled as he heard the argument; but they both acknowledged that it would be right to let it be considered throughout the parish that Sam was to be regarded as blameless for that night's transaction. Nevertheless, Mr. Gilmore's mind on the subject was not changed.

"Have you heard from Loring?" the Squire asked Mrs. Fenwick as he got up to leave the Vicarage.

"Oh, yes,—constantly. She is quite well, Mr. Gilmore."

"I sometimes think that I'll go off and have a look at her."

"I'm sure both she and her aunt would be glad to see you."

"But would it be wise?"

"If you ask me, I am bound to say that I think it would not be wise. If I were you, I would leave her for awhile. Mary is as good as gold, but she is a woman; and, like other women, the more she is sought, the more difficult she will be."

"It always seems to me," said Mr. Gilmore, "that to be successful in love, a man should not be in love at all; or, at any rate, he should hide it." Then he went off home alone, feeling on his heart that pernicious load of a burden which comes from the unrestrained longing for some good thing which cannot be attained. It seemed to him now that nothing in life would be worth a thought if Mary Lowther should continue to say him nay; and it seemed to him, too, that unless the yea were said very quickly, all his aptitudes for enjoyment would be worn out of him.

On the next morning, immediately after breakfast, Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick walked down to the mill together. They went through the village, and thence by a pathway down to a little foot-bridge, and so along the river side. It was a beautiful October morning, the 7th of October, and Fenwick talked of the pheasants. Gilmore, though he was a sportsman, and shot rabbits and partridges about his own property, and went occasionally to shooting-parties at a distance, preserved no game. There had been some old unpleasantness about the Marquis's pheasants, and he had given it up. There could be no doubt that his property in the parish being chiefly low lying lands and water meads unfit for coverts, was not well disposed for preserving pheasants, and that in shooting he would more likely shoot Lord Trowbridge's birds than his own. But it was equally certain that Lord Trowbridge's pheasants made no scruple of feeding on his land. Nevertheless, he had thought it right to give up all idea of keeping up a head of game for his own use in Bullhampton.

"Upon my word, if I were you, Gilmore," said the parson, as a bird rose from the ground close at their feet, "I should cease to be nice about the shooting after what happened yesterday."

"You don't mean that you would retaliate, Frank?"

"I think I should."

"Is that good parson's law?"

"It's very good squire's law. And as for that doctrine of non-retaliation, a man should be very sure of his own motives before he submits to it. If a man be quite certain that he is really actuated by a Christian's desire to forgive, it may be all very well; but if there be any admixture of base alloy in his gold, if he allows

himself to think that he may avoid the evils of pugnacity, and have things go smooth for him here, and become a good Christian by the same process, why then I think he is likely to fall to the ground between two stools."

Had Lord Trowbridge heard him, his lordship would now have been quite sure that Mr. Fenwick was an infidel.

They had both doubted whether Sam would be found at the mill; but there he was, hard at work among the skeleton timbers, when his friends reached the place.

"I am glad to see you at home again, Sam," said Mrs. Fenwick, with something, however, of an inner feeling that perhaps she might be saluting a murderer.

Sam touched his cap, but did not utter a word, or look away from his work. They passed on amidst the heaps in front of the mill, and came to the porch before the cottage. Here, as had been his wont in all these idle days, the miller was sitting with a pipe in his mouth. When he saw the lady he got up and ducked his head, and then sat down again. "If your wife is here, I'll just step in, Mr. Brattle," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"She be there, ma'am," said the miller, pointing towards the kitchen window with his head. So Mrs. Fenwick lifted the latch and entered. The parson sat himself down by the miller's side.

"I am heartily glad, Mr. Brattle, that Sam is back with you here once again."

"He be there, at work among the rest o' 'em," said the miller.

"I saw him as I came along. I hope he will remain here now."

"I can't say, Muster Fenwick."

"But he intends to do so?"

"I can't say, Muster Fenwick."

"Would it not be well that you should ask him?"

"Not as I knows on, Muster Fenwick."

It was manifest enough that the old man had not spoken to his son on the subject of the murder, and that there was no confidence,—at least, no confidence that had been expressed,—between the father and the son. No one had as yet heard the miller utter any opinion as to Sam's innocence or his guilt. This of itself seemed to the clergyman to be a very terrible condition for two persons who were so closely united, and who were to live together, work together, eat together, and have mutual interests.

"I hope, Mr. Brattle," he said, "that you give Sam the full benefit of his discharge."

"He'll get his vittles and his bed, and a trifle of wages if he works for 'em."

"I didn't mean that. I'm quite sure you wouldn't see him want a comfortable home, as long as you have one to give him."

"There ain't much comfort about it now."

"I was speaking of your own opinion of the deed that was done. My own opinion is that Sam had nothing to do with it."

"I'm sure I can't say, Muster Fenwick."

"But it would be a comfort to you to think that he is innocent."

"It ain't no comfort in talking about it,—not at all,—and I'd rayther not, if it's all one to you, Muster Fenwick."

"I will not ask another question, but I'll repeat my own opinion, Mr. Brattle. I don't believe that he had

anything more to do with the robbery or the murder, than I had."

"I hope not, Muster Fenwick. Murder is a terrible crime. And now, if you'll tell me how much it was you paid the lawyer at Heytesbury——"

"I cannot say as yet. It will be some trifle. You need not trouble yourself about that."

"But I mean to pay 'un, Muster Fenwick. I can pay my way as yet, though it's hard enough at times." The parson was obliged to promise that Mr. Jones's bill of charges should be sent to him, and then he called his wife, and they left the mill. Sam was still up among the timbers, and had not once come down while the visitors were in the cottage. Mrs. Fenwick had been more successful with the women than the parson had been with the father. She had taken upon herself to say that she thoroughly believed Sam to be innocent, and they had thanked her with many protestations of gratitude.

They did not go back by the way they had come, but went up to the road, which they crossed, and thence to some outlying cottages which were not very far from Hampton Privets House. From these cottages there was a path across the fields back to Bullhampton, which led by the side of a small wood belonging to the Marquis. There was a good deal of woodland just here, and this special copse, called Hampton bushes, was known to be one of the best pheasant coverts in that part of the country. Whom should they meet, standing on the path, armed with his gun, and with his keeper behind him armed with another, than the Marquis of Trowbridge himself. They had heard a shot or two, but they had thought nothing of it, or they would have gone back to the road. "Don't



“speak,” said the parson, as he walked on quickly with his wife on his arm. The Marquis stood and scowled; but he had the breeding of a gentleman, and when Mrs. Fenwick was close to him, he raised his hat. The parson also raised his, the lady bowed, and then they passed on without a word. “I had no excuse for doing so, or I would certainly have told him that Sam Brattle was comfortably at home with his father,” said the parson.

“How you do like a fight, Frank!”

“If it’s stand up, and all fair, I don’t dislike it.”

CHAPTER XX

I HAVE A JUPITER OF MY OWN NOW

WHEN Mary Lowther returned home from the last walk with her cousin that has been mentioned, she was quite determined that she would not disturb her happiness on that night by the task of telling her engagement to her aunt. It must, of course, be told, and that at once; and it must be told also to Parson John; and a letter must be written to Janet; and another, which would be very difficult in the writing, to Mr. Gilmore; and she must be prepared to bear a certain amount of opposition from all her friends; but for the present moment, she would free herself from these troubles. To-morrow, after breakfast, she would tell her aunt. To-morrow, at lunch-time, Walter would come up to the lane as her accepted lover. And then, after lunch, after due consultation with him and with Aunt Sarah, the letter should be written.

She had solved, at any rate, one doubt, and had investigated one mystery. While conscious of her own coldness towards Mr. Gilmore, she had doubted whether she was capable of loving a man, of loving him as Janet Fenwick loved her husband. Now she would not admit to herself that any woman that ever lived adored a man more thoroughly than she adored Walter Marrable. It was sweet to her to see and to remember the motions of his body. When walking by his side she could hardly forbear to touch him with her shoulder. When parting from him it was a regret to her to take her hand from his. And she told herself that all this

had come to her in the course of one morning's walk, and wondered at it,—that her heart should be a thing capable of being given away so quickly. It had, in truth, been given away quickly enough, though the work had not been done in that one morning's walk. She had been truly honest, to herself and to others, when she said that her cousin Walter was and should be a brother to her; but had her new brother, in his brotherly confidence, told her that his heart was devoted to some other woman, she would have suffered a blow, though she would never have confessed even to herself that she suffered. On that evening, when she reached home, she said very little.

She was so tired. Might she go to bed? "What, at nine o'clock?" asked Aunt Sarah.

"I'll stay up, if you wish it," said Mary.

But before ten she was alone in her own chamber, sitting in her own chair, with her arms folded, feeling, rather than thinking, how divine a thing it was to be in love. What could she not do for him? What would she not endure to have the privilege of living with him? What other good fortune in life could be equal to this good fortune? Then she thought of her relations with Mr. Gilmore, and shuddered as she remembered how near she had been to accepting him. "It would have been so wrong. And yet I did not see it! With him I am sure that it is right, for I feel that in going to him I can be every bit his own."

So she thought, and so she dreamed, and then the morning came, and she had to go down to her aunt. She ate her breakfast almost in silence, having resolved that she would tell her story the moment breakfast was over. She had, over night, and while she was in bed, studiously endeavoured not to con any mode of



telling it. Up to the moment at which she rose her happiness was, if possible, to be untroubled. But while she dressed herself, she endeavoured to arrange her plans. She at last came to the conclusion that she could do it best without any plan.

As soon as Aunt Sarah had finished her breakfast, and just as she was about to proceed, according to her morning custom, down-stairs to the kitchen, Mary spoke. "Aunt Sarah, I have something to tell you. I may as well bring it out at once. I am engaged to marry Walter Marrable." Aunt Sarah immediately let fall the sugar-tongs, and stood speechless. "Dear aunt, do not look as if you were displeased. Say a kind word to me. I am sure you do not think that I have intended to deceive you."

"No; I do not think that," said Aunt Sarah.

"And is that all?"

"I am very much surprised. It was yesterday that you told me, when I hinted at this, that he was no more to you than a cousin,—or a brother."

"And so I thought; indeed I did. But when he told me how it was with him, I knew at once that I had only one answer to give him. No other answer was possible. I love him better than anyone else in all the world. I feel that I can promise to be his wife without the least reserve or fear. I don't know why it should be so; but it is. I know I am right in this." Aunt Sarah still stood silent, meditating. "Don't you think I was right, feeling as I do, to tell him so? I had before become certain, quite, quite certain that it was impossible to give any other answer but one to Mr. Gilmore. Dearest aunt, do speak to me."

"I do not know what you will have to live upon."

"It is settled, you know, that he will save four or



five thousand pounds out of his money, and I have got twelve hundred. It is not much, but it will be just something. Of course he will remain in the army, and I shall be a soldier's wife. I shall think nothing of going out to India, if he wishes it; but I don't think he means that. Dear Aunt Sarah, do say one word of congratulation."

Aunt Sarah did not know how to congratulate her niece. It seemed to her that any congratulation must be false and hypocritical. To her thinking, it would be a most unfitting match. It seemed to her that such an engagement had been most foolish. She was astonished at Mary's weakness, and was indignant with Walter Marrable. As regarded Mary, though she had twice uttered a word or two, intended as a caution, yet she had never thought it possible that a girl so steady in her ordinary demeanour, so utterly averse to all flirtation, so little given to the weakness of feminine susceptibility, would fall at once into such a quagmire of indiscreet love-troubles. The caution had been intended, rather in regard to outward appearances, and perhaps with the view of preventing the possibility of some slight heart-scratches, than with the idea that danger of this nature was to be dreaded. As Mr. Gilmore was there as an acknowledged suitor,—a suitor, as to whose ultimate success Aunt Sarah had her strong opinions,—it would be well those cousinly-brotherly associations and confidences should not become so close as to create possible embarrassment. Such had been the nature of Aunt Sarah's caution; and now,—in the course of a week or two,—when the young people were in truth still strangers to each other,—when Mr. Gilmore was still waiting for his answer,—Mary came to her, and told her that the engagement



was a thing completed! How could she utter a word of congratulation?

"You mean, then, to say that you disapprove of it?" said Mary, almost sternly.

"I cannot say that I think it wise."

"I am not speaking of wisdom. Of course, Mr. Gilmore is very much richer, and all that."

"You know, Mary, that I would not counsel you to marry a man because he was rich."

"That is what you mean when you tell me I am not wise. I tried it,—with all the power of thought and calculation that I could give to it, and I found that I could not marry Mr. Gilmore."

"I am not speaking about that now."

"You mean that Walter is so poor, that he never should be allowed to marry."

"I don't care twopence about Walter."

"But I do, Aunt Sarah. I care more about him than all the world beside. I had to think for him."

"You did not take much time to think."

"Hardly a minute,—and yet it was sufficient." Then she paused, waiting for her aunt; but it seemed that her aunt had nothing further to say. "Well," continued Mary, "if it must be so, it must. If you cannot wish me joy——"

"Dearest, you know well enough that I wish you all happiness."

"This is my happiness." It seemed to the bewildered old lady that the whole nature of the girl was altered. Mary was speaking now as might have spoken some enthusiastic young female who had at last succeeded in obtaining for herself the possession,—more or less permanent,—of a young man, after having fed her imagination on novels for the last five years;



whereas Mary Lowther had hitherto, in all moods of her life, been completely opposite to such feminine ways and doings. "Very well," continued Mary; "we will say nothing more about it at present. I am greatly grieved that I have incurred your displeasure; but I cannot wish it otherwise."

"I have said nothing of displeasure."

"Walter is to be up after lunch, and I will only ask that he may not be received with black looks. If it must be visited as a sin, let it be visited on me."

"Mary, that is unkind and ungenerous."

"If you knew, Aunt Sarah, how I have longed during the night for your kind voice,—for your sympathy and approval!"

Aunt Sarah paused again for a moment, and then went down to her domestic duties without another word.

In the afternoon Walter came, but Aunt Sarah did not see him. When Mary went to her the old lady declared that, for the present, it would be better so. "I do not know what to say to him at present. I must think of it, and speak to his uncle, and try to find out what had best be done."

She was sitting as she said this up in her own room, without even a book in her hand; in very truth, passing an hour in an endeavour to decide what, in the present emergency, she ought to say or do. Mary stooped over her and kissed her, and the aunt returned her niece's caresses.

"Do not let you and me quarrel, at any rate," said Miss Marrable. "Who else is there that I care for? Whose happiness is anything to me except yours?"

"Then come to him, and tell him that he also shall be dear to you."

"No; at any rate, not now. Of course you can marry, Mary, without any sanction from me. I do not pretend that you owe to me that obedience which would be due to a mother. But I cannot say,—at least, not yet,—that such sanction as I have to give can be given to this engagement. I have a dread that it will come to no good. It grieves me. I do not forbid you to receive him; but for the present it would be better that I should not see him."

"What is her objection?" demanded Walter, with grave indignation.

"She thinks we shall be poor."

"Shall we ask her for anything? Of course we shall be poor. For the present there will be but £300 a year, or thereabouts, beyond my professional income. A few years back, if so much had been secured, friends would have thought that everything necessary had been done. If you are afraid, Mary——"

"You know I am not afraid."

"What is it to her, then? Of course we shall be poor,—very poor. But we can live."

There did come upon Mary Lowther a feeling that Walter spoke of the necessity of a comfortable income in a manner very different from that in which he had of late been discussing the same subject ever since she had known him. He had declared that it was impossible that he should exist in England as a bachelor on his professional income, and yet surely he would be poorer as a married man with that £300 a year added to it, than he would have been without it, and also without a wife. But what girl that loves a man can be angry with him for such imprudence and such inconsistency? She had already told him that she would be ready, if it were necessary, to go with him

to India. She had said so before she went up to her aunt's room. He had replied that he hoped no such sacrifice would be demanded from her. "There can be no sacrifice on my part," she had replied, "unless I am required to give up you." Of course he had taken her in his arms and kissed her. There are moments in one's life in which not to be imprudent, not to be utterly, childishly forgetful of all worldly wisdom, would be to be brutal, inhuman, and devilish. "Had he told Parson John?" she asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"And what does he say?"

"Just nothing. He raised his eyebrows, and suggested 'that I had changed my ideas of life.' 'So I have,' I said. 'All right!' he replied. 'I hope that Block and Curling won't have made any mistake about the £5000.' That was all he said. No doubt he thinks we're two fools; but then one's folly won't embarrass him."

"Nor will it embarrass Aunt Sarah," said Mary.

"But there is this difference. If we come to grief, Parson John will eat his dinner without the slightest interference with his appetite from our misfortunes; but Aunt Sarah would suffer on your account."

"She would, certainly," said Mary.

"But we will not come to grief. At any rate, darling, we cannot consent to be made wise by the prospect of her possible sorrows on our behalf."

It was agreed that on that afternoon Mary should write both to Mr. Gilmore and to Janet Fenwick. She offered to keep her letters, and show them, when written, to her lover; but he declared that he would prefer not to see them. "It is enough for me that I triumph," he said, as he left her. When he had gone,



she at once told her aunt that she would write the letters, and bring that to Mr. Gilmore to be read by her when they were finished.

"I would postpone it for awhile, if I were you," said Aunt Sarah.

But Mary declared that any such delay would be unfair to Mr. Gilmore. She did write the letters before dinner, and they were as follows:—

"MY DEAR MR. GILMORE,

"When last you came down to the Vicarage to see me I promised you, as you may perhaps remember, that if it should come to pass that I should engage myself to any other man, I would at once let you know that it was so. I little thought then that I should so soon be called upon to keep my promise. I will not pretend that the writing of this letter is not very painful to me; but I know that it is my duty to write it, and to put an end to a suspense which you have been good enough to feel on my account. You have, I think, heard the name of my cousin, Captain Walter Marrable, who returned from India two or three months ago. I found him staying here with his uncle, the clergyman, and now I am engaged to be his wife.

"Perhaps it would be better that I should say nothing more than this, and that I should leave myself and my character and name to your future kindness,—or unkindness,—without any attempt to win the former or to decry the latter; but you have been to me ever so good and noble that I cannot bring myself to be so cold and short. I have always felt that your preference for me has been a great honour to me. I have appreciated your esteem most highly, and have valued your approbation more than I have been able to say. If it

could be possible that I should in future have your friendship, I should value it more than that of any other person. God bless you, Mr. Gilmore. I shall always hope that you may be happy, and I shall hear with delight any tidings which may seem to show that you are so.

“Pray believe that I am

“Your most sincere friend,

“MARY LOWTHER.

“I have thought it best to tell Janet Fenwick what I have done.”

“Loring, Thursday.

“DEAREST JANET,

“I wonder what you will say to my news? But you must not scold me. Pray do not scold me. It could never, never have been as you wanted. I have engaged myself to marry my cousin, Captain Walter Marrable, who is a nephew of Sir Gregory Marrable, and a son of Colonel Marrable. We shall be very poor, having not more than £300 a-year above his pay as a captain; but if he had nothing, I think I should do the same. Do you remember how I used to doubt whether I should ever have that sort of love for a man for which I used to envy you? I don't envy you any longer, and don't regard Mr. Fenwick as being nearly so divine as I used to do. I have a Jupiter of my own now, and need envy no woman the reality of her love.

“I have written to Mr. Gilmore by the same post as will take this, and have just told him the bare truth. What else could I tell him? I have said something horribly stilted about esteem and friendship, which I would have left out, only that my letter seemed to be

heartless without it. He has been to me as good as a man could be; but was it my fault that I could not love him? If you knew how I tried,—how I tried to make believe to myself that I loved him; how I tried to teach myself that that sort of very chill approbation was the nearest approach to love that I could ever reach; and how I did this because you bade me;—if you could understand all this, then you would not scold me. And I did almost believe that it was so. But now——! Oh, dear! how would it have been if I had engaged myself to Mr. Gilmore, and that then Walter Marrable had come to me! I get sick when I think how near I was to saying that I would love a man whom I never could have loved.

“Of course I used to ask myself what I should do with myself. I suppose every woman living has to ask and answer that question. I used to try to think that it would be well not to think of the outer crust of myself. What did it matter whether things were soft to me or not? I could do my duty. And as this man was good, and a gentleman, and endowed with high qualities and appropriate tastes, why should he not have the wife he wanted? I thought that I could pretend to love him, till, after some fashion, I should love him; but as I think of it now, all this seems to be so horrid! I know now what to do with myself. To be his from head to foot! To feel that nothing done for him would be mean or distasteful! To stand at a washtub and wash his clothes, if it were wanted. Oh, Janet, I used to dread the time in which he would have to put his arm round me and kiss me! I cannot tell you what I feel now about that other he.

“I know well how provoked you will be,—and it will all come of love for me; but you cannot but own

that I am right. If you have any justice in you, write to me and tell me that I am right.

“Only that Mr. Gilmore is your great friend, and that, therefore, just at first, Walter will not be your friend, I would tell you more about him,—how handsome he is, how manly, and how clever. And then his voice is like the music of the spheres. You won’t feel like being his friend at first, but you must look forward to his being your friend; you must love him—as I do Mr. Fenwick; and you must tell Mr. Fenwick that he must open his heart for the man who is to be my husband. Alas, alas! I fear it will be long before I can go to Bullhampton. How I do wish that he would find some nice wife to suit him!

“Good-bye, dearest Janet. If you are really good, you will write me a sweet, kind, loving letter, wishing me joy. You must know all. Aunt Sarah has refused to congratulate me, because the income is so small. Nevertheless, we have not quarrelled. But the income will be nothing to you, and I do look forward to a kind word. When everything is settled, of course I will tell you.

“Your most affectionate friend,

“MARY LOWTHER.”

The former letter of the two was shown to Miss Marrable. That lady was of opinion that it should not be sent; but would not say that, if to be sent, it could be altered for the better.

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CHAPTER XXI

WHAT PARSON JOHN THINKS ABOUT IT

ON that same Thursday, the Thursday on which Mary Lowther wrote her two dispatches to Bullhampton, Miss Marrable sent a note down to Parson John, requesting that she might have an interview with him. If he were at home and disengaged, she would go down to him that evening, or he might, if he pleased, come to her. The former she thought would be preferable. Parson John assented, and very soon after dinner the private brougham came round from the Dragon, and conveyed Miss Marrable down to the rectory at Lowtown.

"I am going down to Parson John," said she to Mary. "I think it best to speak to him about the engagement."

Mary received the information with a nod of her head that was intended to be gracious, and Aunt Sarah proceeded on her way. She found her cousin alone in his study, and immediately opened the subject which had brought her down the hill. "Walter, I believe, has told you about this engagement, Mr. Marrable."

"Never was so astonished in my life! He told me last night. I had begun to think that he was getting very fond of her, but I didn't suppose it would come to this."

"Don't you think it very imprudent?"

"Of course it's imprudent, Sarah. It don't require

any thinking to be aware of that. It's downright stupid;—two cousins, with nothing a year between them, when no doubt each of them might do very well. They're well-born, and well-looking, and clever, and all that. It's absurd, and I don't suppose it will ever come to anything."

"Did you tell Walter what you thought?"

"Why should I tell him? He knows what I think without my telling him; and he wouldn't care a pinch of snuff for my opinion. I tell you because you ask me."

"But ought not something to be done to prevent it?"

"What can we do? I might tell him that I wouldn't have him here any more, but I shouldn't like to do that. Perhaps she'll do your bidding."

"I fear not, Mr. Marrable."

"Then you may be quite sure he won't do mine. He'll go away and forget her. That'll be the end of it. It'll be as good as a year gone out of her life, and she'll lose this other lover of hers at—what's the name of the place? It's a pity, but that's what she'll have to go through."

"Is he so light as that?" asked Aunt Sarah, shocked.

"He's about the same as other men, I take it; and she'll be the same as other girls. They like to have their bit of fun now, and there'd be no great harm,—only such fun costs the lady so plaguy dear. As for their being married, I don't think Walter will ever be such a fool as that."

There was something in this that was quite terrible to Aunt Sarah. Her Mary Lowther was to be treated in this way;—to be played with as a plaything, and

then to be turned off when the time for playing came to an end! And this little game was to be played for Walter Marrable's delectation, though the result of it would be the ruin of Mary's prospects in life!

"I think," said she, "that if I believed him to be so base as that, I would send him out of the house."

"He does not mean to be base at all. He's just like the rest of 'em," said Parson John.

Aunt Sarah used every argument in her power to show that something should be done; but all to no purpose. She thought that if Sir Gregory were brought to interfere, that perhaps might have an effect; but the old clergyman laughed at this. What did Captain Walter Marrable, who had been in the army all his life, and who had no special favour to expect from his uncle, care about Sir Gregory? Head of the family, indeed! What was the head of the family to him? If a girl would be a fool, the girl must take the result of her folly.

That was Parson John's doctrine,—that and a confirmed assurance that this engagement, such as it was, would lead to nothing. He was really very sorry for Mary, in whose praise he said ever so many good-natured things; but she had not been the first fool, and she would not be the last. It was not his business, and he could do no good by interfering. At last, however, he did promise that he would himself speak to Walter. Nothing would come of it, but, as his cousin asked him, he would speak to his nephew.

He waited for four-and-twenty hours before he spoke, and during that time was subject to none of those terrors which were now making Miss Marrable's life a burden to her. In his opinion it was almost a pity that a young fellow like Walter should be interrupted

in his amusement. According to his view of life, very much wisdom was not expected from ladies, young or old. They, for the most part, had their bread found for them! and were not required to do anything, whether they were rich or poor. Let them be ever so poor, the disgrace of poverty did not fall upon them as it did upon men. But then, if they would run their heads into trouble, trouble came harder upon them than on men; and for that they had nobody to blame but themselves. Of course it was a very nice thing to be in love. Verses and pretty speeches and easy-spoken romance were pleasant enough in their way. Parson John had no doubt tried them himself in early life, and had found how far they were efficacious for his own happiness. But young women were so apt to want too much of the excitement! A young man at Bullhampton was not enough without another young man at Loring. That, we fear, was the mode in which Parson John looked at the subject,—which mode of looking at it, had he ever ventured to explain it to Mary Lowther, would have brought down upon his head from that young woman an amount of indignant scorn which would have been very disagreeable to Parson John. But then he was a great deal too wise to open his mind on such a subject to Mary Lowther.

“I think, sir, I’d better go up and see Curling again next week,” said the Captain.

“I dare say. Is anything not going right?”

“I suppose I shall get the money, but I shall like to know when. I am very anxious, of course, to fix a day for my marriage.”

“I should not be over quick about that, if I were you,” said Parson John.

“Why not? Situated as I am, I must be quick. I

must make up my mind at any rate where we're to live."

"You'll go back to your regiment, I suppose, next month?"

"Yes, sir. I shall go back to my regiment next month, unless we may make up our minds to go out to India."

"What, you and Mary?"

"Yes, I and Mary."

"As man and wife?" said Parson John, with a smile.

"How else should we go?"

"Well, no. If she goes with you, she must go as Mrs. Captain Marrable, of course. But if I were you, I would not think of anything so horrible."

"It would be horrible," said Walter Marrable.

"I should think it would. India may be very well when a man is quite young, and if he can keep himself from beer and wine; but to go back there at your time of life with a wife, and to look forward to a dozen children there, must be an unpleasant prospect, I should say."

Walter Marrable sat silent and black.

"I should give up all idea of India," continued his uncle.

"What the duce is a man to do?" asked the Captain.

The parson shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll tell you what I've been thinking of," said the Captain. "If I could get a farm of four or five hundred acres——"

"A farm!" exclaimed the parson.

"Why not a farm? I know that a man can do nothing with a farm unless he has capital. He should have £10 or £12 an acre for his land, I suppose. I

should have that and some trifle of an income besides if I sold out. I suppose my uncle would let me have a farm under him?"

"He'd see you—further first."

"Why shouldn't I do as well with a farm as another?"

"Why not turn shoemaker? Because you have not learned the business. Farmer, indeed! You'd never get the farm, and if you did, you would not keep it for three years. You've been in the army too long to be fit for anything else, Walter."

Captain Marrable looked black and angry at being so counselled; but he believed what was said to him, and had no answer to make to it.

"You must stick to the army," continued the old man; "and if you'll take my advice, you'll do so without the impediment of a wife."

"That's quite out of the question."

"Why is it out of the question?"

"How can you ask me, Uncle John? Would you have me go back from an engagement after I have made it?"

"I would have you go back from anything that was silly."

"And tell a girl, after I have asked her to be my wife, that I don't want to have anything more to do with her?"

"I should not tell her that; but I should make her understand, both for her own sake and for mine, that we had been too fast, and that the sooner we gave up our folly the better for both of us. You can't marry her, that's the truth of it."

"You'll see if I can't."

"If you choose to wait ten years, you may."

"I won't wait ten months, nor, if I can have my own way, ten weeks." What a pity that Mary could not have heard him. "Half the fellows in the army are married without anything beyond their pay; and I'm to be told that we can't get along with £300 a year! At any rate, we'll try."

"Marry in haste, and repent at leisure," said Uncle John.

"According to the doctrines that are going now-a-days," said the Captain, "it will be held soon that a gentleman can't marry unless he has got £3000 a year. It is the most heartless, damnable teaching that ever came up. It spoils the men, and makes women, when they do marry, expect ever so many things that they ought never to want."

"And you mean to teach them better, Walter?"

"I mean to act for myself, and not be frightened out of doing what I think right, because the world says this and that."

As he so spoke, the angry Captain got up to leave the room.

"All the same," rejoined the parson, firing the last shot; "I'd think twice about it, if I were you, before I married Mary Lowther."

"He's more of an ass, and twice as headstrong as I thought him," said Parson John to Miss Marrable the next day; "but still I don't think it will come to anything. As far as I can observe, three of these engagements are broken off for one that goes on. And when he comes to look at things he'll get tired of it. He's going up to London next week, and I shan't press him to come back. If he does come I can't help it. If I were you, I wouldn't ask him up the hill, and I should tell Miss Mary a bit of my mind pretty plainly."

Hitherto, as far as words went, Aunt Sarah had told very little of her mind to Mary Lowther on the subject of her engagement, but she had spoken as yet no word of congratulation; and Mary knew that the manner in which she proposed to bestow herself was not received with favour by any of her relatives at Loring.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT THE FENWICKS THOUGHT ABOUT IT

BULLHAMPTON unfortunately was at the end of the postman's walk, and as the man came all the way from Lavington, letters were seldom received much before eleven o'clock. Now this was a most pernicious arrangement, in respect to which Mr. Fenwick carried on a perpetual feud with the Post-office authorities, having put forward a great postal doctrine that letters ought to be rained from heaven on to everybody's breakfast-table exactly as the hot water is brought in for tea. He, being an energetic man, carried on a long and angry correspondence with the authorities aforesaid; but the old man from Bullhampton continued to toddle into the village just at eleven o'clock. It was acknowledged that ten was his time; but, as he argued with himself, ten and eleven were pretty much of a muchness. The consequence of this was, that Mary Lowther's letters to Mrs. Fenwick had been read by her two or three hours before she had an opportunity of speaking on the subject to her husband. At last, however, he returned, and she flew at him with the letter in her hand. "Frank," she said, "Frank, what do you think has happened?"

"The Bank of England must have stopped, from the look of your face."

"I wish it had, with all my heart, sooner than this. Mary has gone and engaged herself to her cousin, Walter Marrable."

"Mary Lowther!"

"Yes; Mary Lowther! Our Mary! And from what

I remember hearing about him, he is anything but nice."

"He had a lot of money left to him the other day."

"It can't have been much, because Mary owns that they will be very poor. Here is her letter. I am so unhappy about it. Don't you remember hearing about that Colonel Marrable who was in a horrible scrape about somebody's wife?"

"You shouldn't judge the son from the father."

"They've been in the army together, and they're both alike. I hate the army. They are almost always no better than they should be."

"That's true, my dear, certainly of all services, unless it be the army of martyrs; and there may be a doubt on the subject even as to them. May I read it?"

"Oh, yes; she has been half ashamed of herself every word she has written. I know her so well. To think that Mary Lowther should have engaged herself to any man after two days' acquaintance!"

Mr. Fenwick read the letter through attentively, and then handed it back. "It's a good letter," he said.

"You mean that it's well written?"

"I mean that it's true. There are no touches put in to make effect. She does love the one man, and she doesn't love the other. All I can say is, that I'm very sorry for it. It will drive Gilmore out of the place."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do, indeed. I never knew a man to be at the same time so strong and so weak in such a matter. One would say that the intensity of his affection would be the best pledge of his future happiness if he were to marry the girl; but seeing that he is not to marry her, one cannot but feel that a man shouldn't stake his happiness on a thing beyond his reach."

"You think it is all up, then;—that she really will marry this man?"

"What else can I think?"

"These things do go off sometimes. There can't be much money, because, you see, old Miss Marrable opposes the whole thing on account of there not being income enough. She is anything but rich herself, and is the last person of all the world to make a fuss about money. If it could be broken off——"

"If I understand Mary Lowther," said Mr. Fenwick, "she is not the woman to have her match broken off for her by any person. Of course I know nothing about the man; but if he is firm, she'll be as firm."

"And then she has written to Mr. Gilmore," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"It's all up with Harry as far as this goes," said Mr. Fenwick.

The Vicar had another matter of moment to discuss with his wife. Sam Brattle, after having remained hard at work at the mill for nearly a fortnight,—so hard at work as to induce his father to declare that he'd bet a guinea there wasn't a man in the three parishes who could come nigh his Sam for a right down day's work;—after all this, Sam had disappeared, had been gone for two days, and was said by the constable to have been seen at night on the Devizes side, from whence was supposed to come the Grinder, and all manner of Grinder's iniquities. Up to this time no further arrest had been made on account of Mr. Trumbull's murder, nor had any trace been found of the Grinder, or of that other man who had been his companion. The leading policeman, who still had charge of the case, expressed himself as sure that the old woman at Pycroft Common knew nothing of her son's whereabouts; but

he had always declared, and still continued to declare, that Sam Brattle could tell them the whole story of the murder if he pleased, and there had been a certain amount of watching kept on the young man, much to his own disgust, and to that of his father. Sam had sworn aloud in the village—so much aloud that he had shown his determination to be heard by all men—that he would go to America, and see whether anyone would dare to stop him. He had been told of his bail, and had replied that he would demand to be relieved of his bail;—that his bail was illegal, and that he would have it all tried in a court of law. Mr. Fenwick had heard of this, and had replied that as far as he was concerned he was not in the least afraid. He believed that the bail was illegal, and he believed also that Sam would stay where he was. But now Sam was gone, and the Bullhampton constable was clearly of opinion that he had gone to join the Grinder. “At any rate, he’s off somewhere,” said Mr. Fenwick, “and his mother doesn’t know where he’s gone. Old Brattle, of course, won’t say a word.”

“And will it hurt you?”

“Not unless they get hold of those other fellows and require Sam’s appearance. I don’t doubt but that he’d turn up in that case.”

“Then it does not signify?”

“It signifies for him. I’ve an idea that I know where he’s gone, and I think I shall go after him.”

“Is it far, Frank?”

“Something short of Australia, luckily.”

“Oh, Frank!”

“I’ll tell you the truth. It’s my belief that Carry Brattle is living about twenty miles off, and that he’s gone to see his sister.”

"Carry Brattle!—down here!"

"I don't know it, and I don't want to hear it mentioned; but I fancy it is so. At any rate, I shall go and see."

"Poor, dear, bright little Carry! But how is she living, Frank?"

"She's not one of the army of martyrs, you may be sure. I daresay she's no better than she should be."

"You'll tell me if you see her?"

"Oh, yes."

"Shall I send her anything?"

"The only thing to send her is money. If she is in want, I'll relieve her,—with a very sparing hand."

"Will you bring her back,—here?"

"Ah, who can say? I should tell her mother, and I suppose we should have to ask her father to receive her. I know what his answer will be."

"He'll refuse to see her."

"No doubt. Then we should have to put our heads together, and the chances are that the poor girl will be off in the meantime,—back to London and the Devil. It is not easy to set crooked things straight."

In spite, however, of this interruption, Mary Lowther and her engagement to Captain Marrable was the subject of greatest interest at the Vicarage that day and through the night. Mrs. Fenwick half expected that Gilmore would come down in the evening; but the Vicar declared that his friend would be unwilling to show himself after the blow which he would have received. They knew that he would know that they had received the news, and that therefore he could not come either to tell it, or with the intention of asking questions without telling it. If he came at all, he must come like a beaten cur with his tail between his legs.

And then there arose the question whether it would not be better that Mary's letter should be answered before Mr. Gilmore was seen. Mrs. Fenwick, whose fingers were itching for pen and paper, declared at last that she would write at once; and did write, as follows, before she went to bed:—

“The Vicarage, Friday.

“DEAREST MARY,

“I do not know how to answer your letter. You tell me to write pleasantly, and to congratulate you; but how is one to do that so utterly in opposition to one's own interests and wishes? Oh dear, oh dear! how I do so wish you had stayed at Bullhampton! I know you will be angry with me for saying so, but how can I say anything else? I cannot picture you to myself going about from town to town and living in country-quarters. And as I never saw Captain Mar-
rable, to the best of my belief, I cannot interest myself about him as I do about one whom I know and love and esteem. I feel that this is not a nice way of writing to you, and indeed I would be nice if I could. Of course I wish you to be full of joy;—of course I wish with all my heart that you may be happy if you marry your cousin; but the thing has come so suddenly that we cannot bring ourselves to look upon it as a reality.”

“You should speak for yourself, Janet,” said Mr. Fenwick, when he came to this part of the letter. He did not, however, require that the sentence should be altered.

“You talk so much of doing what is right! Nobody has ever doubted that you were right both in morals

and sentiment. The only regret has been that such a course should be right, and that the other thing should be wrong. Poor man! we have not seen him yet, nor heard from him. Frank says that he will take it very badly. I suppose that men do always get over that kind of thing much quicker than women do. Many women never can get over it at all; and Harry Gilmore, though there is so little about him that seems to be soft, is in this respect more like a woman than a man. Had he been otherwise, and had only half cared for you, and asked you to be his wife as though your taking him were a thing he didn't much care about, and were quite a matter of course, I believe you would have been up at Hampton Privets this moment, instead of going soldiering with a captain.

"Frank bids me send you his kindest love and his best wishes for your happiness. Those are his very words, and they seem to be kinder than mine. Of course you have my love and my best wishes; but I do not know how to write as though I could rejoice with you. Your husband will always be dear to us, whoever he may be, if he be good to you. At present I feel very, very angry with Captain Marrable; as though I wish he had had his head blown off in battle. However, if he is to be the happy man, I will open my heart to him;—that is, if he be good.

"I know this is not nice, but I cannot make it nicer now. Good bless you, dearest Mary.

"Ever your most affectionate friend,

"JANET FENWICK."

The letter was not posted till the hour for despatch on the following day; but, up to that hour, nothing had been seen at the Vicarage of Mr. Gilmore.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT MR. GILMORE THOUGHT ABOUT IT

MR. GILMORE was standing on the doorsteps of his own house when Mary's letter was brought to him. It was a modest-sized country gentleman's residence, built of variegated uneven stones, black and grey and white, which seemed to be chiefly flint; but the corners and settings of the windows and of the door-ways, and the chimneys, were of brick. There was something sombre about it, and many perhaps might call it dull of aspect; but it was substantial, comfortable, and unassuming. It was entered by broad stone steps, with iron balustrades curving outwards as they descended, and there was an open area round the house, showing that the offices were in the basement. In these days it was a quiet house enough, as Mr. Gilmore was a man not much given to the loudness of bachelor parties. He entertained his neighbours at dinner perhaps once a month, and occasionally had a few guests staying with him. His uncle, the prebendary from Salisbury, was often with him, and occasionally a brother who was in the army. For the present, however, he was much more inclined, when in want of society, to walk off to the Vicarage than to provide it for himself at home. When Mary's letter was handed to him with his "Times" and other correspondence, he looked, as everybody does, at the address, and at once knew that it came from Mary Lowther. He had never hitherto received a letter from her, but yet he knew her handwriting

well. Without waiting a moment, he turned upon his heel, and went back into his house, and through the hall to the library. When there, he first opened three other letters, two from tradesmen in London, and one from his uncle, offering to come to him on the next Monday. Then he opened the "Times," and cut it, and put it down on the table. Mary's letter meanwhile was in his hand, and anyone standing by might have thought that he had forgotten it. But he had not forgotten, nor was it out of his mind for a moment. While looking at the other letters, while cutting the paper, while attempting, as he did, to read the news, he was suffering under the dread of the blow that was coming. He was there for twenty minutes before he dared to break the envelope; and though during the whole of that time he pretended to deceive himself by some employment, he knew that he was simply postponing an evil thing that was coming to him. At last he cut the letter open, and stood for some moments looking for courage to read it. He did read it, and then sat himself down in his chair, telling himself that the thing was over, and that he would bear it as a man. He took up his newspaper, and began to study it. It was the time of the year when newspapers are not very interesting, but he made a rush at the leading articles, and went through two of them. Then he turned over to the police reports. He sat there for an hour, and read hard during the whole time. Then he got up and shook himself, and knew that he was a crippled man, with every function out of order, disabled in every limb. He walked from the library into the hall, and thence to the dining-room, and so, backwards and forwards, for a quarter of an hour. At last he could walk no longer, and, closing the door of the

library behind him, he threw himself on a sofa and cried like a woman.

What was it that he wanted, and why did he want it? Were there not other women whom the world would say were as good? Was it ever known that a man had died, or become irretrievably broken and destroyed by disappointed love? Was it not one of those things that a man should shake off from him, and have done with it? He asked himself these, and many such-like questions, and tried to philosophise with himself on the matter. Had he no will of his own by which he might conquer this enemy? No; he had no will of his own, and the enemy would not be conquered. He had to tell himself that he was so poor a thing that he could not stand up against the evil that had fallen on him.

He walked out round his shrubberies and paddocks, and tried to take an interest in the bullocks and the horses. He knew that if every bullock and horse about the place had been struck dead it would not enhance his misery. He had not had much hope before, but now he would have seen the house of Hampton Privets in flames, just for the chance that had been his yesterday. It was not only that he wanted her, or that he regretted the absence of some recognised joys which she would have brought to him; but that the final decision on her part seemed to take from him all vitality, all power of enjoyment, all that inward elasticity which is necessary for an interest in worldly affairs.

He had as yet hardly thought of anything but himself;—had hardly observed the name of his successful rival, or paid any attention to aught but the fact that she had told him that it was all over. He had not

attempted to make up his mind whether anything could still be done, whether he might yet have a chance, whether it would be well for him to quarrel with the man; whether he should be indignant with her, or remonstrate once again in regard to her cruelty. He had thought only of the blow, and of his inability to support it. Would it not be best that he should go forth, and blow out his brains, and have done with it?

He did not look at the letter again till he had returned to the library. Then he took it from his pocket, and read it very carefully. Yes, she had been quick about it. Why; how long had it been since she had left their parish? It was still October, and she had been there just before the murder—only the other day! Captain Walter Marrable! No; he didn't think he had ever heard of him. Some fellow with a moustache and a military strut—just the man that he had always hated; one of a class which, with nothing real to recommend it, is always interfering with the happiness of everybody. It was in some such light as this that Mr. Gilmore at present regarded Captain Marrable. How could such a man make a woman happy,—a fellow who probably had no house nor home in which to make her comfortable? Staying with his uncle the clergyman! Poor Gilmore expressed a wish that the uncle the clergyman had been choked before he had entertained such a guest. Then he read the concluding sentence of poor Mary's letter, in which she expressed a hope that they might be friends. Was there ever such cold-blooded trash? Friends indeed! What sort of friendship could there be between two persons, one of whom had made the other so wretched,—so dead as was he at present!

For some half-hour he tried to comfort himself with

an idea that he could get hold of Captain Marrable and maul him; that it would be a thing permissible for him, a magistrate, to go forth with a whip and flog the man, and then perhaps shoot him, because the man had been fortunate in love where he had been unfortunate. But he knew the world in which he lived too well to allow himself long to think that this could really be done. It might be that it would be a better world were such revenge practicable in it; but, as he well knew, it was not practicable now, and if Mary Lowther chose to give herself to this accursed Captain, he could not help it. There was nothing that he could do but to go away and chafe at his suffering in some part of the world in which nobody would know that he was chafing.

When the evening came, and he found that his solitude was terribly oppressive to him, he thought that he would go down to the Vicarage. He had been told by that false one that her tidings had been sent to her friend. He took his hat and sauntered out across the fields, and did walk as far as the church-yard gate close to poor Mr. Trumbull's farm, the very spot on which he had last seen Mary Lowther; but when he was there he could not endure to go through to the Vicarage. There is something mean to a man in the want of success in love. If a man lose a venture of money he can tell his friend; or if he be unsuccessful in trying for a seat in parliament; or be thrown out of a run in the hunting-field; or even if he be black-balled for a club; but a man can hardly bring himself to tell his dearest comrade that his Mary has preferred another man to himself. This wretched fact the Fenwicks already knew as to poor Gilmore's Mary; and yet, though he had come down there, hoping for some comfort, he did not dare to face them. He went back

all alone, and tumbled and tossed and fretted through the miserable night.

And the next morning was as bad. He hung about the place till about four, utterly crushed by his burden. It was a Saturday, and when the postman called no letter had yet been even written in answer to his uncle's proposition. He was moping about the grounds, with his hands in his pockets, thinking of this, when suddenly Mrs. Fenwick appeared in the path before him. There had been another consultation that morning between herself and her husband, and this visit was the result of it. He dashed at the matter immediately.

"You have come," he said, "to talk to me about Mary Lowther."

"I have come to say a word, if I can, to comfort you. Frank bade me to come."

"There isn't any comfort," he replied.

"We knew that it would be hard to bear, my friend," she said, putting her hand within his arm; "but there is comfort."

"There can be none for me. I had set my heart upon it so that I cannot forget it."

"I know you had, and so had we. Of course there will be sorrow, but it will wear off." He shook his head without speaking. "God is too good," she continued, "to let such troubles remain with us long."

"You think, then," he said, "that there is no chance?"

What could she say to him? How, under the circumstances of Mary's engagement, could she encourage his love for her friend?

"I know that there is none," he continued. "I feel, Mrs. Fenwick, that I do not know what to do with myself or how to hold myself. Of course it is nonsense

to talk about dying, but I do feel as though if I didn't die I should go crazy. I can't settle my mind to a single thing."

"It is fresh with you yet, Harry," she said. She had never called him Harry before, though her husband did so always, and now she used the name in sheer tenderness.

"I don't know why such a thing should be different with me than with other people," he said; "only perhaps I am weaker. But I've known from the very first that I have staked everything upon her. I have never questioned to myself that I was going for all or nothing. I have seen it before me all along, and now it has come. Oh, Mrs. Fenwick, if God would strike me dead this moment, it would be a mercy!" And then he threw himself on the ground at her feet. He was not there a moment before he was up again. "If you knew how I despise myself for all this, how I hate myself!"

She would not leave him, but stayed there till he consented to come down with her to the Vicarage. He should dine there, and Frank should walk back with him at night. As to that question of Mr. Chamberlaine's visit, respecting which Mrs. Fenwick did not feel herself competent to give advice herself, it should become matter of debate between them and Frank, and then a man and horse should be sent to Salisbury on Sunday morning. As he walked down to the Vicarage with that pretty woman at his elbow, things perhaps were a little better with him.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REV. HENRY FITZACKERLEY CHAMBERLAINE.

It was decided that evening at the Vicarage that it would be better for all parties that the reverend uncle from Salisbury should be told to make his visit, and spend the next week at Hampton Privets; that is, that he should come on the Monday and stay till the Saturday. The letter was written down at the Vicarage, as Fenwick feared that it would never be written if the writing of it were left to the unassisted energy of the Squire. The letter was written, and the Vicar, who walked back to Hampton Privets with his friend, took care that it was given to a servant on that night.

On the Sunday nothing was seen of Mr. Gilmore. He did not come to church, nor would he dine at the Vicarage. He remained the whole day in his own house, pretending to write, trying to read, with accounts before him, with a magazine in his hand, even with a volume of sermons open on the table before him. But neither the accounts, nor the magazines, nor the sermons, could arrest his attention for a moment. He had staked everything on obtaining a certain object, and that object was now beyond his reach. Men fail often in other things, in the pursuit of honour, fortune, or power, and when they fail they can begin again. There was no beginning again for him. When Mary Lowther should have married this captain, she would be a thing lost to him for ever;—and was she not as bad as married to this man already? He could do nothing to stop her marriage.

Early in the afternoon of Monday the Rev. Henry Fitzackerley Chamberlaine reached Hampton Privets. He came with his own carriage and a pair of post-horses, as befitted a Prebendary of the good old times. Not that Mr. Chamberlaine was a very old man, but that it suited his tastes and tone of mind to adhere to the well-bred ceremonies of life, so many of which went out of fashion when railroads came in. Mr. Chamberlaine was a gentleman of about fifty-five years of age, unmarried, possessed of a comfortable private independence, the incumbent of a living in the fens of Cambridgeshire, which he never visited,—his health forbidding him to do so,—on which subject there had been a considerable amount of correspondence between him and a certain Right Rev. Prelate, in which the Prebendary had so far got the better in the argument as not to be disturbed in his manner of life; and he was, as has been before said, the owner of a stall in Salisbury Cathedral. His lines had certainly fallen to him in very pleasant places. As to that living in the fens, there was not much to prick his conscience, as he gave up the parsonage house and two-thirds of the income to his curate, expending the other third on local charities. Perhaps the argument which had most weight in selecting the Bishop was contained in a short postscript to one of his letters. “By-the-by,” said the postscript, “perhaps I ought to inform your lordship that I have never drawn a penny of income out of Hardbedloe since I ceased to live there.” “It’s a Bishop’s living,” said the happy holder of it, “to one or two clerical friends, and Dr.— thinks the patronage would be better in his hands than in mine. I disagree with him, and he’ll have to write a great many letters before he succeeds.” But his stall was worth £800 a year and

a house, and Mr. Chamberlaine, in regard to his money matters, was quite in clover.

He was a very handsome man, about six feet high, with large light grey eyes, a straight nose, and a well cut chin. His lips were thin, but his teeth were perfect,—only that they had been supplied by a dentist. His grey hair encircled his head, coming round upon his forehead in little wavy curls, in a manner that had conquered the hearts of spinsters by the dozen in the cathedral. It was whispered, indeed, that married ladies would sometimes succumb, and rave about the beauty, and the dignity, and the white hands, and the deep rolling voice of the Rev. Henry Fitzackerley Chamberlaine. Indeed, his voice was very fine when it would be heard from the far-off end of the choir during the communion service, altogether trumping the exertion of the other second-rate clergyman who would be associated with him at the altar. And he had, too, great gifts of preaching, which he would exercise once a week during thirteen weeks of the year. He never exceeded twenty-five minutes; every word was audible throughout the whole choir, and there was a grace about it that was better than any doctrine. When he was to be heard the cathedral was always full, and he was perhaps justified in regarding himself as one of the ecclesiastical stars of the day. Many applications were made to him to preach here and there, but he always refused. Stories were told of how he had declined to preach before the Queen at St. James's, averring that if Her Majesty would please to visit Salisbury, every accommodation should be provided for her. As to preaching at Whitehall, Westminster, and St. Paul's, it was not doubted that he had over and over again declared that his appointed place was

in his own stall, and that he did not consider that he was called to holding forth in the market-place. He was usually abroad during the early autumn months, and would make sundry prolonged visits to friends; but his only home was his prebendal residence in the Close. It was not much of a house to look at from the outside, being built with the plainest possible construction of brick; but within it was very pleasant. All that curtains, and carpets, and armchairs, and books, and ornaments could do, had been done lavishly, and the cellar was known to be the best in the city. He always used post-horses, but he had his own carriage. He never talked very much, but when he did speak people listened to him. His appetite was excellent, but he was a feeder not very easy to please; it was understood well by the ladies of Salisbury that if Mr. Chamberlaine was expected to dinner, something special must be done in the way of entertainment. He was always exceedingly well dressed. What he did with his hours nobody knew, but he was supposed to be a man well educated at all points. That he was such a judge of all works of art, that not another like him was to be found in Wiltshire, nobody doubted. It was considered that he was almost as big as the Bishop, and not a soul in Salisbury would have thought of comparing the Dean to him. But the Dean had seven children, and Mr. Chamberlaine was quite unencumbered.

Henry Gilmore was a little afraid of his uncle, but would always declare that he was not so. "If he chooses to come over here he is welcome," the nephew would say; "but he must live just as I do." Nevertheless, though there was but little left of the '47 Lafitte in the cellar of Hampton Privets, a bottle was always

brought up when Mr. Chamberlaine was there, and Mrs. Bunker, the cook, did not pretend but that she was in a state of dismay from the hour of his coming to that of his going. And yet, Mrs. Bunker and the other servants liked him to be there. His presence honoured the Privets. Even the boy who blacked his boots felt that he was blacking the boots of a great man. It was acknowledged throughout the household that the Squire having such an uncle, was more of a Squire than he would have been without him. The clergyman, being such as he was, was greater than the country gentleman. And yet Mr. Chamberlaine was only a Prebendary, was the son of a country clergyman who had happened to marry a wife with money, and had absolutely never done anything useful in the whole course of his life. It is often very curious to trace the sources of greatness. With Mr. Chamberlaine, I think it came from the whiteness of his hands, and from a certain knack he had of looking as though he could say a great deal, though it suited him better to be silent, and say nothing. Of outside deportment, no doubt, he was a master.

Mr. Fenwick always declared that he was very fond of Mr. Chamberlaine, and greatly admired him. "He is the most perfect philosopher I ever met," Fenwick would say, "and has gone to the very centre depth of contemplation. In another ten years he will be the great Akinetos. He will eat and drink, and listen, and be at ease, and desire nothing. As it is, no man that I know disturbs other people so little." On the other hand, Mr. Chamberlaine did not profess any great admiration for Mr. Fenwick, who he designated as one of the smart "windbag tribe, clever, no doubt, and perhaps conscientious, but shallow and perhaps a little

conceited." The Squire, who was not clever and not conceited, understood them both, and much preferred his friend the Vicar to his uncle the Prebendary.

Gilmore had once consulted his uncle,—once in an evil moment, as he now felt,—whether it would not be well for him to marry Miss Lowther. The uncle had expressed himself as very adverse to the marriage, and would now, on this occasion, be sure to ask some question about it. When the great man arrived the Squire was out, still wandering round among the bullocks and sheep; but the evening after dinner would be very long. On the following day Mr. and Mrs. Fenwick, with Mr. and Mrs. Greenthorne, were to dine at the Privets. If this first evening were only through, Gilmore thought that he could get some comfort, even from his uncle. As he came near the house, he went into the yard, and saw the Prebendary's grand carriage, which was being washed. No; as far as the groom knew, Mr. Chamberlaine had not gone out; but was in the house then. So Gilmore entered, and found his uncle in the library.

His first questions were about the murder. "You did catch one man, and let him go?" said the Prebendary.

"Yes; a tenant of mine; but there was no evidence against him. He was not the man."

"I would not have let him go," said Mr. Chamberlaine.

"You would not have kept a man that was innocent?" said Gilmore.

"I would not have let the young man go."

"But the law would not support us in detaining him."

"Nevertheless, I would not have let him go," said Mr. Chamberlaine. "I heard all about it."

"From whom did you hear?"

"From Lord Trowbridge. I certainly would not have let him go." It appeared, however, that Lord Trowbridge's opinion had been given to the Prebendary prior to that fatal meeting which had taken place in the house of the murdered man.

The uncle drank his claret in silence on this evening. He said nothing, at least, about Mary Lowther.

"I don't know where you got it, Harry, but that is not a bad glass of wine."

"We think there's none better in the country, sir," said Harry.

"I should be very sorry to commit myself so far; but it is a good glass of wine. By the bye, I hope your chef has learned to make a cup of coffee since I was here in the spring. I think we will try it now." The coffee was brought, and the Prebendary shook his head,—the least shake in the world,—and smiled blandly.

"Coffee is the very devil in the country," said Harry Gilmore, who did not dare to say that the mixture was good in opposition to his uncle's opinion.

After the coffee, which was served in the library, the two men sat silent together for half an hour, and Gilmore was endeavouring to think what it was that made his uncle come to Bullhampton. At last, before he had arrived at any decision on this subject, there came first a little nod, then a start and a sweet smile, then another nod and a start without the smile, and, after that, a soft murmuring of a musical snore, which gradually increased in deepness till it became evident that the Prebendary was extremely happy. Then it occurred to Gilmore that perhaps Mr. Chamberlaine might become tired of going to sleep in his own house, and that he had come to the Privets, as he could not

do so with comfortable self-satisfaction in the houses of indifferent friends. For the benefit of such a change it might perhaps be worth the great man's while to undergo the penalty of a bad cup of coffee.

And could not he, too, go to sleep,—he, Gilmore? Could he not fall asleep,—not only for a few moments on such an occasion as this,—but altogether, after the Akinetos fashion, as explained by his friend Fenwick? Could he not become an immovable one, as was this divine uncle of his? No Mary Lowther had ever disturbed that man's happiness. A good dinner, a pretty ring, an easy chair, a china tea-cup, might all be procured with certainty, as long as money lasted. Here was a man before him superbly comfortable, absolutely happy, with no greater suffering than what might come to him from a chance cup of bad coffee, while he, Harry Gilmore himself, was as miserable a devil as might be found between the four seas, because a certain young woman wouldn't come to him and take half of all that he owned! If there were any curative philosophy to be found, why could not he find it? The world might say that the philosophy was a low philosophy; but what did that matter, if it would take away out of his breast that horrid load which was more than he could bear? He declared to himself that he would sell his heart with all its privileges for half-a-farthing, if he could find anybody to take it with all its burden. Here, then, was a man who had no burden. He was snoring with almost harmonious cadence,—slowly, discreetly,—one might say, artistically, quite like a gentleman; and the man who so snored could not but be happy. “Oh, d—n it!” said Gilmore, in a private whisper, getting up and leaving the room; but there was more of envy than of anger in the exclamation.

"Ah! you've been out," said Mr. Chamberlaine, when his nephew returned.

"Been to look at the horses made up."

"I never can see the use of that; but I believe a great many men do it. I suppose it's an excuse for smoking generally." Now, Mr. Chamberlaine did not smoke.

"Well; I did light my pipe."

"There's not the slightest necessity for telling me so, Harry. Let us see if Mrs. Bunker's tea is better than her coffee." Then the bell was rung, and Mr. Chamberlaine desired that he might have a cup of black tea, not strong, but made with a good deal of tea, and poured out rapidly, without much decoction. "If it be strong and harsh I can't sleep a wink," he said. The tea was brought, and sipped very leisurely. There was then a word or two said about certain German baths from which Mr. Chamberlaine had just returned; and Mr. Gilmore began to believe that he should not be asked to say anything about Mary Lowther that night.

But the Fates were not so kind. The Prebendary had arisen with the intention of retiring for the night, and was already standing before the fire, with his bedroom candle in his hand, when something,—the happiness probably of his own position in life, which allowed him to seek the blessings of an undivided couch,—brought to his memory the fact that his nephew had spoken to him about some young woman; some young woman who had possessed not even the merit of a dowry.

"By the bye," said he, "what has become of that flame of yours, Harry?" Harry Gilmore became black and glum. He did not like to hear Mary spoken of

as a flame. He was standing at this moment with his back to his uncle, and so remained, without answering him. "Do you mean to say that you did not ask her, after all?" asked the uncle. "If there be any scrape, Harry, you had better let me hear it."

"I don't know what you call a scrape," said Harry. "She's not going to marry me."

"Thank God, my boy!" Gilmore turned round, but his uncle did not probably see his face. "I can assure you," continued Mr. Chamberlaine, "that the idea made me quite uncomfortable. I set some inquiries on foot, and she was not the sort of girl that you should marry."

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On the next morning the Vicar started alone in his gig. He had at first said that he would take with him a nondescript boy, who was partly groom, partly gardener, and partly shoeblick, and who consequently did half the work of the house; but at last he decided that he would go alone. "Peter is very silent, and most meritoriously uninterested in everything," he said to his wife. "He wouldn't tell much, but even he might tell something." So he got himself into his gig, and drove off alone. He took the Devizes road, and passed through Lavington without asking a question; but when he was half way between that place and

Devizes, he stopped his horse at a lane that led away to the right. He had been on the road before, but he did not know that lane. He waited a while till an old woman whom he saw coming to him, reached him, and asked whether the lane would take him across to the Marlborough Road. The old woman knew nothing of the Marlborough Road, and looked as though she had never heard of Marlborough. Then he asked the way to Pycroft Common. Yes; the lane would take him to Pycroft Common. Would it take him to the Bald-faced Stag? The old woman said it would take him to Rump End Corner, "but she didn't know nowt o' t'other place." He took the lane, however, and without much difficulty made his way to the Bald-faced Stag,—which, in the days of the glory of that branch of the Western Road, used to supply beer to at least a dozen coaches a day, but which now, alas! could slake no drowth but that of the rural aborigines. At the Bald-faced Stag, however, he found that he could get a feed of corn, and here he put up his horse,—and saw the corn eaten.

Pycroft Common was a mile from him, and to Pycroft Common he walked. He took the road towards Marlborough for half a mile, and then broke off across the open ground to the left. There was no difficulty in finding this place, and now it was his object to discover the cottage of Mrs. Burrows without asking the neighbours for her by name. He had obtained a certain amount of information, and thought that he could act on it. He walked on to the middle of the common, and looked for his points of bearing. There was the beer-house, and there was the lane that led away to Pewsey, and there were the two brick cottages standing together. Mrs. Burrows lived in the

little white cottage just behind. He walked straight up to the door, between the sunflowers and the rose-bush, and, pausing for a few moments to think whether or no he would enter the cottage unannounced, knocked at the door. A policeman would have entered without doing so,—and so would a poacher knock over a hare on its form; but whatever creature a gentleman or a sportsman be hunting, he will always give it a chance. He rapped, and immediately heard that there were sounds within. He rapped again, and in about a minute was told to enter. Then he opened the door, and found but one person within. It was a young woman, and he stood for a moment looking at her before he spoke.

“Carry Brattle,” he said, “I am glad that I have found you.”

“Laws, Mr. Fenwick!”

“Carry, I am so glad to see you;”—and then he put out his hand to her.

“Oh, Mr. Fenwick, I ain’t fit for the likes of you to touch,” she said. But as his hand was still stretched out she put her own into it, and he held it in his grasp for a few seconds. She was a poor, sickly-looking thing now, but there were the remains of great beauty in the face,—or rather, the presence of beauty, but of beauty obscured by flushes of riotous living and periods of want, by ill-health, harsh usage, and, worst of all, by the sharp agonies of an intermittent conscience. It was a pale, gentle face, on which there were still streaks of pink,—a soft, laughing face it had been once, and still there was a gleam of light in the eyes that told of past merriment, and almost promised mirth to come, if only some great evil might be cured. Her long flaxen curls still hung down her face, but they were larger, and, as Fenwick thought, more tawdry than of yore; and her

cheeks were thin, and her eyes were hollow; and then there had come across her mouth that look of boldness which the use of bad, sharp words, half-wicked and half-witty, will always give. She was dressed decently, and was sitting in a low chair, with a torn, disreputable-looking old novel in her hand. Fenwick knew that the book had been taken up on the spur of the moment, as there had certainly been someone there when he had knocked at the door.

And yet, though vice had laid its heavy hand upon her, the glory and the brightness, and the sweet outward flavour of innocence, had not altogether departed from her. Though her mouth was bold, her eyes were soft and womanly, and she looked up into the face of the clergyman with a gentle, tamed, beseeching gaze, which softened and won his heart at once. Not that his heart had ever been hard against her. Perhaps it was a fault with him that he never hardened his heart against a sinner, unless the sin implied pretence and falsehood. At this moment, remembering the little Carry Brattle of old, who had sometimes been so sweetly obedient, and sometimes so wilful, under his hands, whom he had petted, and caressed, and scolded, and loved,—whom he had loved undoubtedly in part because she had been so pretty,—whom he had hoped that he might live to marry to some good farmer, in whose kitchen he would ever be welcome, and whose children he would christen;—remembering all this, he would now, at this moment, have taken her in his arms and embraced her, if he dared, showing her that he did not account her to be vile, begging her to become more good, and planning some course for her future life.

“I have come across from Bullhampton, Carry, to find you,” he said.

"It's a poor place you're come to, Mr. Fenwick. I suppose the police told you of my being here?"

"I had heard it. Tell me, Carry, what do you know of Sam?"

"Of Sam?"

"Yes—of Sam. Don't tell me an untruth. You need tell me nothing, you know, unless you like. I don't come to ask as having any authority, only as a friend of his, and yours."

She paused a moment before she replied. "Sam hasn't done any harm to nobody," she said.

"I don't say he has. I only want to know where he is. You can understand, Carry, that it would be best that he should be at home."

She paused again, and then she blurted out her answer. "He went out o' that back door, Mr. Fenwick, when you came in at t'other." The Vicar immediately went to the back door, but Sam, of course, was not to be seen.

"Why should he be hiding if he has done no harm?" said the Vicar.

"He thought it was one of them police. They do be coming here a'most every day, till one's heart faints at seeing 'em. I'd go away if I'd e'er a place to go to."

"Have you no place at home, Carry?"

"No, sir; no place."

This was so true that he couldn't tell himself why he had asked the question. She certainly had no place at home till her father's heart should be changed towards her.

"Carry," said he, speaking very slowly, "they tell me that you are married. Is that true?"

She made him no answer.

"I wish you would tell me, if you can. The state of

a married woman is honest at any rate, let her husband be who he may."

"My state is not honest."

"You are not married, then?"

"No, sir."

He hardly knew how to go on with this interrogation, or to ask questions about her past and present life, without expressing a degree of censure which, at any rate for the present, he wished to repress.

"You are living here, I believe, with old Mrs. Burrows?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"I was told that you were married to her son."

"They told you untrue, sir. I know nothing of her son, except just to have see'd him."

"Is that true, Carry?"

"It is true. It wasn't he at all."

"Who was it, Carry?"

"Not her son;—but what does it signify? He's gone away, and I shall see un no more. He wasn't no good, Mr. Fenwick, and if you please we won't talk about un."

"He was not your husband?"

"No, Mr. Fenwick; I never had a husband, nor never shall, I suppose. What man would take the likes of me? I have just got one thing to do, and that's all."

"What thing is that, Carry?"

"To die and have done with it," she said, bursting out into loud sobs. "What's the use o' living? Nobody 'll see me, or speak to me. Ain't I just so bad that they'd hang me if they knew how to catch me?"

"What do you mean, girl?" said Fenwick, thinking for the moment that from her words she, too, might have had some part in the murder.

"Ain't the police coming here after me a'most every day? And when they hauls about the place, and me too, what can I say to 'em? I have got that low that a'most everybody can say what they please to me. And where can I go out o' this? I don't want to be living here always with that old woman."

"Who is the old woman, Carry?"

"I suppose you knows, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Mrs. Burrows, is it?" She nodded her head. "She is the mother of the man they call the Grinder?" Again she nodded her head. "Is it he whom they accuse of the murder?" Yet again she nodded her head. "There was another man?" She nodded it again. "And they say that there was a third," he said,—"your brother Sam."

"Then they lie," she shouted, jumping up from her seat. "They lie like devils. They are devils; and they'll go, oh, down in the fiery furnace for ever and ever." In spite of the tragedy of the moment, Mr. Fenwick could not help joining this terribly earnest threat and the Marquis of Trowbridge together in his imagination. "Sam hadn't no more to do with it than you had, Mr. Fenwick."

"I don't believe he had," said Mr. Fenwick.

"Yes; because you're good, and kind, and don't think ill of poor folk when they're a bit down. But as for them, they're devils."

"I did not come here, however, to talk about the murder, Carry. If I thought you knew who did it, I shouldn't ask you. That is business for the police, not for me. I came here partly to look after Sam. He ought to be at home. Why has he left his home and his work while his name is thus in people's mouths?"

"It ain't for me to answer for him, Mr. Fenwick. Let 'em say what they will, they can't make the white of his eye black. But as for me, I ain't no business to speak of nobody. How should I know why he comes and why he goes? If I said as how he'd come to see his sister, it wouldn't sound true, would it, sir, she being what she is?"

He got up and went to the front door, and opened it, and looked about him. But he was looking for nothing. His eyes were full of tears, and he didn't care to wipe the drops away in her presence.

"Carry," he said, coming back to her, "it wasn't all for him that I came."

"For who else, then?"

"Do you remember how we loved you when you were young, Carry? Do you remember my wife, and how you used to come and play with the children on the lawn? Do you remember, Carry, where you sat in church, and the singing, and what trouble we had together with the chaunts? There are one or two at Bullhampton who never will forget it?"

"Nobody loves me now," she said, talking at him over her shoulder, which was turned to him.

He thought for a moment that he would tell her that the Lord loved her; but there was something human at his heart, something perhaps too human, which made him feel that were he down low upon the ground, some love that was nearer to him, some love that was more easily intelligible, which had been more palpably felt, would in his frailty and his wickedness be of more immediate avail to him than the love even of the Lord God.

"Why should you think that, Carry?"

"Because I am bad."

"If we were to love only the good, we should love very few. I love you, Carry, truly. My wife loves you dearly."

"Does she?" said the girl, breaking into low sobs. "No, she don't. I know she don't. The likes of her couldn't love the likes of me. She wouldn't speak to me. She wouldn't touch me."

"Come and try, Carry."

"Father would kill me," she said.

"Your father is full of wrath, no doubt. You have done that which must make a father angry."

"Oh, Mr. Fenwick, I wouldn't dare to stand before his eye for a minute. The sound of his voice would kill me straight. How could I go back?"

"It isn't easy to make crooked things straight, Carry, but we may try; and they do become straighter if one tries in earnest. Will you answer me one question more?"

"Anything about myself, Mr. Fenwick?"

"Are you living in sin now, Carry?" She sat silent, not that she would not answer him, but that she did not comprehend the extent of the meaning of his question. "If it be so, and if you will not abandon it, no honest person can love you. You must change yourself, and then you will be loved."

"I have got the money which he gave me, if you mean that," she said.

Then he asked no further questions about herself, but reverted to the subject of her brother. Could she bring him in to say a few words to his old friend? But she declared that he was gone, and that she did not know whither; that he might probably return this very day to the mill, having told her that it was his purpose to do so soon. When he expressed a hope that Sam

as a flame. He was standing at this moment with his back to his uncle, and so remained, without answering him. "Do you mean to say that you did not ask her, after all?" asked the uncle. "If there be any scrape, Harry, you had better let me hear it."

"I don't know what you call a scrape," said Harry. "She's not going to marry me."

"Thank God, my boy!" Gilmore turned round, but his uncle did not probably see his face. "I can assure you," continued Mr. Chamberlaine, "that the idea made me quite uncomfortable. I set some inquiries on foot, and she was not the sort of girl that you should marry."

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On the next morning the Vicar started alone in his gig. He had at first said that he would take with him a nondescript boy, who was partly groom, partly gardener, and partly shoeblack, and who consequently did half the work of the house; but at last he decided that he would go alone. "Peter is very silent, and most meritoriously uninterested in everything," he said to his wife. "He wouldn't tell much, but even he might tell something." So he got himself into his gig, and drove off alone. He took the Devizes road, and passed through Lavington without asking a question; but when he was half way between that place and

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conduct,—I believe I may be justified in saying the misconduct,—of the Reverend — Fenwick, the vicar of Bullhampton.” He knew our friend’s Christian name very well, but he did not choose to have it appear that his august memory had been laden with a thing so trifling. “You may have heard that there has been a most horrid murder committed in the parish on one of my tenants; and that suspicion is rife that the murder was committed in part by a young man, the son of a miller who lives under a person who owns some land in the parish. The family is very bad, one of the daughters being, as I understand, a prostitute. The other day I thought it right to visit the parish with the view of preventing, if possible, the sojourn there among my people of these objectionable characters. When there I was encountered by Mr. Fenwick, not only in a most unchristian spirit, but in a bearing so little gentlemanlike, that I cannot describe it to you. He had obtruded himself into my presence, into one of my own houses, the very house of the murdered man, and there, when I was consulting with the person to whom I have alluded as to the expediency of ridding ourselves of these objectionable characters, he met me with ribaldry and personal insolence. When I tell your lordship that he made insinuations about my own daughters, so gross that I cannot repeat them to you, I am sure that I need go no further. There were present at this meeting Mr. Puddleham, the Methodist minister, and Mr. Henry Gilmore, the landlord of the persons in question.

“Your lordship has probably heard the character, in a religious point of view, of this gentleman. It is not for me to express an opinion of the motives which can induce such a one to retain his position as an in-

cumbent of a parish. But I do believe that I have a right to ask from your lordship for some inquiry into the scene which I have attempted to describe, and to expect some protection for the future. I do not for a moment doubt that your lordship will do what is right in the matter. I have the honour to be,

“Right Reverend and dear Lord Bishop,

“Your most obedient and faithful Servant,

“TROWBRIDGE.”

He read this over thrice, and became so much in love with the composition, that on the third reading he had not the slightest doubt as to the expediency of sending it. Nor had he much doubt but that the Bishop would do something to Mr. Fenwick, which would make the parish too hot to hold that disgrace to the Church of England.

When Fenwick came home from Pycroft Common he found a letter from the Bishop awaiting him. He had driven forty miles on that day, and was rather late for dinner. His wife, however, came upstairs with him in order that she might hear something of his story, and brought his letters with her. He did not open that from the Bishop till he was half dressed, and then burst out into loud laughter as he read it.

“What is it, Frank?” asked his wife, through the open door of her own room.

“Here’s such a game,” said he. “Never mind; let’s have dinner, and then you shall see it.” The reader, however, may be quite sure that Mrs. Fenwick did not wait till dinner was served before she knew the nature of the game.

The Bishop’s letter to the Vicar was very short and very rational, and it was not that which made the Vicar

cumbent of a parish. But I do believe that I have a laugh; but inside the Bishop's letter was that from the Marquis.

"MY DEAR MR. FENWICK," said the Bishop, "after a good deal of consideration I have determined to send you the enclosed. I do so because I have made it a rule never to receive an accusation against one of my clergy without sending it to the person accused. You will, of course, perceive that it alludes to some matter which lies outside of my control and right of inquiry; but perhaps you will allow me, as a friend, to suggest to you that it is always well for a parish clergyman to avoid controversy and quarrel with his neighbours; and that it is especially expedient that he should be on good terms with those who have influence in his parish. Perhaps you will forgive me if I add that a spirit of pugnacity, though no doubt it may lead to much that is good, has its bad tendencies if not watched closely.

"Pray remember that Lord Trowbridge is a worthy man, doing his duty on the whole well; and that his position, though it be entitled to no veneration, is entitled to much respect. If you can tell me that you will feel no grudge against him for what has taken place, I shall be very happy.

"You will observe that I have been careful that this letter shall have no official character.

"Yours very faithfully,

&c., &c., &c."

The letter was answered that evening, but before the answer was written, the Marquis of Trowbridge was discussed between the husband and wife, not in com-

plimentary terms. Mrs. Fenwick on the occasion was more pugnacious than her husband. She could not forgive the man who had hinted to the Bishop that her husband held his living from unworthy motives, and that he was a bad clergyman.

"My dear girl," said Fenwick, "what can you expect from an ass but his ears?"

"I don't expect downright slander from such a man as the Marquis of Trowbridge, and if I were you I should tell the Bishop so."

"I shall tell him nothing of the kind. I shall write about the Marquis with the kindest feelings."

"But you don't feel kindly?"

"Yes, I do. The poor old idiot has nobody to keep him right, and does the best he can according to his lights. I have no doubt he thinks that I am everything that is horrid. I am not a bit angry with him, and would be as civil to him to-morrow as my nature would allow me, if he would only be civil to me."

Then he wrote his letter which will complete the correspondence, and which he dated for the following day:

"Bullhampton Vicarage, Oct. 23, 186—.

"MY DEAR LORD BISHOP,

"I return the Marquis's letter with many thanks. I can assure you that I take in proper spirit your little hints as to my pugnacity of disposition, and will endeavour to profit by them. My wife tells me that I am given to combativeness, and I have no doubt that she is right.

"As to Lord Trowbridge, I can assure your lordship that I will not bear any malice against him, or even think ill of him because of his complaint. He and I probably differ in opinion about almost every-

thing, and he is one of those who pity the condition of all who are so blind as to differ from him. The next time that I am thrown into his company I shall act exactly as though no such letter had been written, and as if no such meeting had taken place as that which he describes.

“I hope I may be allowed to assure your lordship, without any reference to my motives for keeping it, that I shall be very slow to give up a living in your lordship’s diocese. As your letter to me is unofficial,—and I thank you heartily for sending it in such form,—I have ventured to reply to it in the same strain.

“I am, my dear Lord Bishop,

“Your very faithful servant,

“FRANCIS FENWICK.”

“There,” said he, as he folded it, and handed it to his wife, “I shall never see the remainder of the series. I would give a shilling to know how the Bishop gets out of it in writing to the Marquis, and half-a-crown to see the Marquis’s rejoinder.” The reader shall be troubled with neither, as he would hardly price them so high as did the Vicar. The Bishop’s letter really contained little beyond an assurance on his part that Mr. Fenwick had not meant anything wrong, and that the matter was one with which he, the Bishop, had no concern; all which was worded with the most complete episcopal courtesy. The rejoinder of the Marquis was long, elaborate, and very pompous. He did not exactly scold the Bishop, but he expressed very plainly his opinion that the Church of England was going to the dogs, because a Bishop had not the power of utterly abolishing any clergyman who might be guilty

of an offence against so distinguished a person as the Marquis of Trowbridge.

But what was to be done about Carry Brattle? Mrs. Fenwick, when she had expressed her anger against the Marquis, was quite ready to own that the matter of Carry's position was to them of much greater moment than the wrath of the peer. How were they to put out their hands and save that brand from the burning? Fenwick, in his ill-considered zeal, suggested that she might be brought to the Vicarage; but his wife at once knew that such a step would be dangerous in every way. How could she live, and what would she do? And what would the other servants think of it?

"Why would the other servants mind it?" asked Fenwick. But his wife on such a matter could have a way of her own, and the project was soon knocked on the head. No doubt her father's house was the proper place for her, but then her father was so dour a man.

"Upon my word," said the Vicar, "he is the only person in the world of whom I believe myself to be afraid. When I get at him I do not speak to him as I would to another; and of course he knows it."

Nevertheless, if anything was to be done for Carry Brattle, it seemed as though it must be done by her father's permission and assistance. "There can be no doubt that it is his duty," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"I will not say that as a certainty," said the husband. "There is a point at which, I presume, a father may be justified in disowning a child. The possession of such a power, no doubt, keeps others from going wrong. What one wants is that a father should be presumed to have the power; but that when the time

comes, he should never use it. It is the comfortable doctrine which we are all of us teaching;—wrath, and abomination of the sinner, before the sin; pardon and love after it. If you were to run away from me, Janet——”

“Frank, do not dare to speak of anything so horrible.”

“I should say now probably that were you to do so, I would never blast my eyes by looking at you again; but I know that I should run after you, and implore you to come back to me.”

“You wouldn’t do anything of the kind; and it isn’t proper to talk about it; and I shall go to bed.”

“It is very difficult to make crooked things straight,” said the Vicar, as he walked about the room after his wife had left him. “I suppose she ought to go into a reformatory. But I know she wouldn’t; and I shouldn’t like to ask her after what she said.”

It is probably the case that Mr. Fenwick would have been able to do his duty better, had some harsher feeling towards the sinner been mixed with his charity.

CHAPTER XXVII

I NEVER SHAMED NONE OF THEM

"SOMETHING must be done about Carry Brattle at once." The Vicar felt that he had pledged himself to take some steps for her welfare, and it seemed to him, as he thought of the matter, that there were only two steps possible. He might intercede with her father, or he might use his influence to have her received into some house of correction, some retreat, in which she might be kept from evil and disciplined for good. He knew that the latter would be the safer plan, if it could be brought to bear; and it would certainly be the easier for himself. But he thought that he had almost pledged himself to the girl not to attempt it, and he felt sure that she would not accede to it. In his doubt he went up to his friend Gilmore, intending to obtain the light of his friend's wisdom. He found the Squire and the Prebendary together, and at once started his subject.

"You'll do no good, Mr. Fenwick," said Mr. Chamberlaine, after the two younger men had been discussing the matter for half an hour.

"Do you mean that I ought not to try to do any good?"

"I mean that such efforts never come to anything."

"All the unfortunate creatures in the world, then, should be left to go to destruction in their own way."

"It is useless, I think, to treat special cases in an exceptional manner. When such is done, it is done from enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is never useful."

"What ought a man to do, then, for the assistance of such fellow-creatures as this poor girl?" asked the Vicar.

"There are penitentiaries and reformatories, and it is well, no doubt, to subscribe to them," said the Prebendary. "The subject is so full of difficulty that one should not touch it rashly. Henry, where is the last 'Quarterly'?"

"I never take it, sir."

"I ought to have remembered," said Mr. Chamberlaine, smiling blandly. Then he took up the "Saturday Review," and endeavoured to content himself with that.

Gilmore and Frank walked down to the mill together, it being understood that the Squire was not to show himself there. Fenwick's difficult task, if it were to be done at all, must be done by himself alone. He must beard the lion in his den, and make the attack without any assistance. Gilmore had upon the whole been disposed to think that no such attack should be made. "He'll only turn upon you with violence, and no good will be done," said he. "He can't eat me," Fenwick had replied, acknowledging, however, that he approached the undertaking with fear and trembling. Before they were far from the house Gilmore had changed the conversation and fallen back upon his own sorrows. He had not answered Mary's letter, and now declared that he did not intend to do so. What could he say to her? He could not write and profess friendship; he could not offer her his congratulations; he could not belie his heart by affecting indifference. She had thrown him over, and now he knew it. Of what use would it be to write to her and tell her that she had made him miserable for ever? "I shall break up the house and get away," said he.

"Don't do that rashly, Harry. There can be no spot in the world in which you can be so useful as you are here."

"All my usefulness has been dragged out of me. I don't care about the place or about the people. I am ill already, and shall become worse. I think I will go abroad for four or five years. I've an idea I shall go to the States."

"You'll become tired of that, I should think."

"Of course I shall. Everything is tiresome to me. I don't think anything else can be so tiresome as my uncle, and yet I dread his leaving me,—when I shall be alone. I suppose if one was out among the Rocky Mountains, one wouldn't think so much about it."

"Atra Căra sits behind the horseman," said the Vicar. "I don't know that travelling will do it. One thing certainly will do it."

"And what is that?"

"Hard work. Some doctor told his patient that if he'd live on half-a-crown a day and earn it, he'd soon be well. I'm sure that the same prescription holds good for all maladies of the mind. You can't earn the half-a-crown a day, but you may work as hard as though you did."

"What shall I do?"

"Read, dig, shoot, look after the farm, and say your prayers. Don't allow yourself time for thinking."

"It's fine philosophy," said Gilmore, "but I don't think any man ever made himself happy by it. I'll leave you now."

"I'd go and dig, if I were you," said the Vicar.

"Perhaps I will. Do you know, I've half an idea that I'll go to Loring."

"What good will that do?"

"I'll find out whether this man is a blackguard. I believe he is. My uncle knows something about his father, and says that a bigger scamp never lived."

"I don't see what good you can do, Harry," said the Vicar. And so they parted.

Fenwick was about half a mile from the mill when Gilmore left him, and he wished that it were a mile and a half. He knew well that an edict had gone forth at the mill that no one should speak to the old man about his daughter. With the mother the Vicar had often spoken of her lost child, and had learned from her how sad it was to her that she could never dare to mention Carry's name to her husband. He had cursed his child, and had sworn that she should never more have part in him or his. She had brought sorrow and shame upon him, and he had cut her off with a steady resolve that there should be no weak backsliding on his part. Those who knew him best declared that the miller would certainly keep his word, and hitherto no one had dared to speak of the lost one in her father's hearing. All this Mr. Fenwick knew, and he knew also that the man was one who could be very fierce in his anger. He had told his wife that old Brattle was the only man in the world before whom he would be afraid to speak his mind openly, and in so saying he had expressed a feeling that was very general throughout all Bullhampton. Mr. Puddleham was a very meddling man, and he had once ventured out to the mill to say a word, not indeed about Carry, but touching some youthful iniquity of which Sam was supposed to have been guilty. He never went near the mill again, but would shudder and lift up his hands and his eyes when the miller's name was mentioned. It was not that Brattle used rough

language, or became violently angry when accosted; but there was a sullen sternness about the man, and a capability of asserting his own mastery and personal authority, which reduced those who attacked him to the condition of vanquished combatants, and repulsed them, so that they would retreat as beaten dogs. Mr. Fenwick, indeed, had always been well received at the mill. The women of the family loved him dearly, and took great comfort in his visits. From his first arrival in the parish he had been on intimate terms with them, though the old man had never once entered his church. Brattle himself would bear with him more kindly than he would with his own landlord, who might at any day have turned him out of his holding. But even Fenwick had been so answered more than once as to have been forced to retreat with that feeling of having his tail, like a cur, between his legs. "He can't eat me," he said to himself, as the low willows round the mill came in sight. When a man is reduced to that consolation, as many a man often is, he may be nearly sure that he will be eaten.

When he got over the stile into the lane close to the mill-door, he found that the mill was going. Gilmore had told him that it might probably be so, as he had heard that the repairs were nearly finished. Fenwick was sure that after so long a period of enforced idleness Brattle would be in the mill, but he went at first into the house and there found Mrs. Brattle and Fanny. Even with them he hardly felt himself to be at home, but after a while he managed to ask a few questions about Sam. Sam had come back, and was now at work, but he had had some terribly hard words with his father. The old man had desired to know where his son had been. Sam had declined to tell, and

had declared that if he was to be cross-questioned about his comings and goings he would leave the mill altogether. His father had told him that he had better go. Sam had not gone, but the two had been working on together since without interchanging a word. "I want to see him especially," said Mr. Fenwick.

"You mean Sam, sir?" asked the mother.

"No; his father. I will go out into the lane, and perhaps Fanny will ask him to come to me." Mrs. Brattle immediately became dismayed by a troop of fears, and looked up into his face with soft, supplicating, tearful eyes. So much of sorrow had come to her of late! "There is nothing wrong, Mrs. Brattle," he said.

"I thought perhaps you had heard something of Sam."

"Nothing but what has made me surer than ever that he had no part in what was done at Mr. Trumbull's farm."

"Thank God for that!" said the mother, taking him by the hand. Then Fanny went into the mill, and the Vicar followed her out of the house, on to the lane. He stood leaning against a tree till the old man came to him. He then shook the miller's hand, and made some remark about the mill. They had begun again that morning, the miller said. Sam had been off again, or they might have been at work on yesterday forenoon.

"Do not be angry with him; he has been on a good work," said the Vicar.

"Good or bad, I know nowt of it," said the miller.

"I know, and if you wish I will tell you; but there is another thing I must say first. Come a little way down the lane with me, Mr. Brattle."

The Vicar had assumed a tone which was almost one of rebuke, not intending it, but falling into it from want of histrionic power in his attempt to be bold and solemn at the same time. The miller at once resented it. "Why should I come down the lane?" said he. "You're axing me to come out at a very busy moment, Muster Fenwick."

"Nothing can be so important as that which I have to say. For the love of God, Mr. Brattle,—for the love you bear your wife and children, endure with me for ten minutes." Then he paused, and walked on, and Mr. Brattle was still at his elbow. "My friend, I have seen your daughter."

"Which daughter?" said the miller, arresting his step.

"Your daughter Carry, Mr. Brattle." Then the old man turned round and would have hurried back to the mill without a word; but the Vicar held him by his coat. "If I have ever been a friend to you or yours, listen to me now one minute."

"Do I come to your house and tell you of your sorrows and your shame? Let me go!"

"Mr. Brattle, if you will stretch forth your hand, you may save her. She is your own child—your flesh and blood. Think how easy it is for a poor girl to fall,—how great is the temptation and how quick, and how it comes without knowledge of the evil that is to follow! How small is the sin, and how terrible the punishment! Your friends, Mr. Brattle, have forgiven you worse sins than ever she has committed."

"I never shamed none of them," said he, struggling on his way back to the mill.

"It is that, then;—your own misfortune and not the girl's sin that would harden your heart against your

own child? You will let her perish in the streets, not because she has fallen, but because she has hurt you in her fall! Is that to be a father? Is that to be a man? Mr. Brattle, think better of yourself, and dare to obey the instincts of your heart."

But by this time the miller had escaped, and was striding off in furious silence to the mill. The Vicar, oppressed by a sense of utter failure, feeling that his interference had been absolutely valueless, that the man's wrath and constancy were things altogether beyond his reach, stood where he had been left, hardly daring to return to the house and say a word or two to the women there. But at last he did go back. He knew well that Brattle himself would not be seen in the house till his present mood was over. After any encounter of words he would go and work in silence for half a day, and would seldom or never refer again to what had taken place; he would never, so thought the Vicar, refer to the encounter which had just taken place; but he would remember it always, and it might be that he would never again speak in friendship to a man who had offended him so deeply.

After a moment's thought he determined to tell the wife, and he informed her and Fanny that he had seen Carry over at Pycroft Common. The mother's questions as to what her child was doing, how she was living, whether she were ill or well, and alas! whether she were happy or miserable, who cannot imagine?

"She is anything but happy, I fear," said Mr. Fenwick.

"My poor Carry!"

"I should not wish that she should be happy till she be brought back to the decencies of life. What shall we do to bring her back?"

"Would she come if she were let to come?" asked Fanny.

"I believe she would. I feel sure that she would."

"And what did he say, Mr. Fenwick?" asked the mother. The Vicar only shook his head. "He's very good; to me he's ever been good as gold. But, oh, Mr. Fenwick, he is so hard."

"He will not let you speak of her?"

"Never a word, Mr. Fenwick. He'd look at you, sir, so that the gleam of his eyes would fall on you like a blow. I wouldn't dare;—nor yet wouldn't Fanny, who dares more with him than any of us."

"If it 'd serve her, I'd speak," said Fanny.

"But couldn't I see her, Mr. Fenwick? Couldn't you take me in the gig with you, sir? I'd slip out arter breakfast up the road, and he wouldn't be no wiser, at least till I war back again. He wouldn't ax no questions then, I'm thinking. Would he, Fan?"

"He'd ask at dinner; but if I said you were out for the day along with Mr. Fenwick, he wouldn't say any more, maybe. He'd know well enough where you was gone to."

Mr. Fenwick said that he would think of it, and let Fanny know on the following Sunday. He would not make a promise now, and at any rate he could not go before Sunday. He did not like to pledge himself suddenly to such an adventure, knowing that it would be best that he should first have his wife's ideas on the matter. Then he took his leave, and as he went out of the house he saw the miller standing at the door of the mill. He raised his hand and said, "Good-bye," but the miller quickly turned his back to him and re-treated into his mill.

As he walked up to his house through the village

he met Mr. Puddleham. "So Sam Brattle is off again, sir," said the minister.

"Off what, Mr. Puddleham?"

"Gone clean away. Out of the country."

"Who told you that, Mr. Puddleham?"

"Is'n it true, sir? You ought to know, Mr. Fenwick, as you're one of the bailsmen."

"I've just been at the mill, and I didn't see him."

"I don't think you'll ever see him at the mill again, Mr. Fenwick; nor yet in Bullhampton, unless the police have to bring him here."

"As I was saying, I didn't see him at the mill, Mr. Puddleham, because I didn't go in; but he's working there at this moment, and has been all the day. He's all right, Mr. Puddleham. You go and have a few words with him, or with his father, and you'll find they're quite comfortable at the mill now."

"Constable Hicks told me that he was out of the country," said Mr. Puddleham, walking away in considerable disgust.

Mrs. Fenwick's opinion was, upon the whole, rather in favour of the second expedition to Pycroft Common, as she declared that the mother should at any rate be allowed to see her child. She indeed would not submit to the idea of the miller's indomitable powers. If she were Mrs. Brattle, she said, she'd pull the old man's ears, and make him give way.

"You go and try," said the Vicar.

On the Sunday morning following, Fanny was told that on Wednesday Mr. Fenwick would drive her mother over to Pycroft Common. He had no doubt, he said, but that Carry would still be found living with Mrs. Burrows. He explained that the old woman had luckily been absent during his visit, but would probably

be there when they went again. As to that they must take their chance. And the whole plan was arranged. Mr. Fenwick was to be on the road in his gig at Mr. Gilmore's gate at ten o'clock, and Mrs. Brattle was to meet him there at that hour.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. BRATTLE'S JOURNEY

MRS. BRATTLE was waiting at the stile opposite to Mr. Gilmore's gate as Mr. Fenwick drove up to the spot. No doubt the dear old woman had been there for the last half-hour, thinking that the walk would take her twice as long as it did, and fearing that she might keep the Vicar waiting. She had put on her Sunday clothes and her Sunday bonnet, and when she climbed up into the vacant place beside her friend she found her position to be so strange that for a while she could hardly speak. He said a few words to her, but pressed her with no questions, understanding the cause of her embarrassment. He could not but think that of all his parishioners no two were so unlike each other as were the miller and his wife. The one was so hard and invincible;—the other so soft and submissive! Nevertheless it had always been said that Brattle had been a tender and affectionate husband. By degrees the woman's awe at the horse and gig and strangeness of her position wore off, and she began to talk of her daughter. She had brought a little bundle with her, thinking that she might supply feminine wants, and had apologised humbly for venturing to come so laden. Fenwick, who remembered what Carry had said about money that she still had, and who was nearly sure that the murderers had gone to Pycroft Common after the murder had been committed, had found a difficulty in explaining to Mrs. Brattle that her

child was probably not in want. The son had been accused of the murder of the man, and now the Vicar had but little doubt that the daughter was living on the proceeds of the robbery. "It's a hard life she must be living, Mr. Fenwick, with an old 'ooman the likes of that," said Mrs. Brattle. "Perhaps if I'd brought a morsel of some'at to eat——"

"I don't think they're pressed in that way, Mrs. Brattle."

"Ain't they now? But it's a'most worse, Mr. Fenwick, when one thinks where it's to come from. The Lord have mercy on her, and bring her out of it!"

"Amen," said the Vicar.

"And is she bright at all, and simple still? She was the brightest, simplest lass in all Bull'ompton, I used to think. I suppose her old ways have a'most left her, Mr. Fenwick?"

"I thought her very like what she used to be."

"'Deed now, did you, Mr. Fenwick? And she wasn't mopish and slatternly like?"

"She was tidy enough. You wouldn't wish me to say that she was happy?"

"I suppose not, Mr. Fenwick. I shouldn't ought;—ought I now? But, Mr. Fenwick, I'd give my left hand she should be happy and gay once more. I suppose none but a mother feels it, but the sound of her voice through the house was ever the sweetest music I know'd on. It'll never have the same ring again, Mr. Fenwick."

He could not tell her that it would. That sainted sinner of whom he had reminded Mr. Puddleham, though she had attained to the joy of the Lord,—even she had never regained the mirth of her young innocence. There is a bloom on the flower which may

rest there till the flower has utterly perished, if the handling of it be sufficiently delicate;—but no care, nothing that can be done by friends on earth, or even by better friendship from above, can replace that when once displaced. The sound of which the mother was thinking could never be heard again from Carry Brattle's voice. "If we could only get her home once more," said the Vicar, "she might be a good daughter to you still."

"I'd be a good mother to her, Mr. Fenwick;—but I'm thinking he'll never have it so. I never knew him to change on a thing like that, Mr. Fenwick. He felt it that keenly, it nigh killed 'im. Only that he took it out o' hisself in thrashing that wicked man, I a'most think he'd a' died o' it."

Again the Vicar drove to the Bald-Faced Stag, and again he walked along the road and over the common. He offered his arm to the old woman, but she wouldn't accept it; nor would she upon any entreaty allow him to carry her bundle. She assured him that his doing so would make her utterly wretched, and at last he gave up the point. She declared that she suffered nothing from fatigue, and that her two miles' walk would not be more than her Sunday journey to church and back. But as she drew near to the house she became uneasy, and once asked to be allowed to pause for a moment. "Maybe, then," said she, "after all, my girl 'd rather that I wouldn't trouble her." He took her by the arm and led her along, and comforted her,—assuring her that if she would take her child in her arms Carry would for the moment be in a heaven of happiness. "Take her into my arms, Mr. Fenwick? Why,—isn't she in my very heart of hearts at this moment? And I won't say not a word sharp to her;

—not now, Mr. Fenwick. And why would I say sharp words at all? I suppose she understands it all.”

“I think she does, Mrs. Brattle.”

They had now reached the door, and the Vicar knocked. No answer came at once; but such had been the case when he knocked before. He had learned to understand that in such a household it might not be wise to admit all comers without consideration. So he knocked again,—and then again. But still there came no answer. Then he tried the door, and found that it was locked. “Maybe she’s seen me coming,” said the mother, “and now she won’t let me in.” The Vicar then went round the cottage, and found that the back door also was closed. Then he looked in at one of the front windows, and became aware that no one was sitting, at least in the kitchen. There was an upstairs room, but of that the window was closed.

“I begin to fear,” he said, “that neither of them is at home.”

At this moment he heard the voice of a woman calling to him from the door of the nearest cottage,—one of the two brick tenements which stood together,—and from her he learned that Mrs. Burrows had gone into Devizes, and would not probably be home till the evening. Then he asked after Carry, not mentioning her name, but speaking of her as the young woman who lived with Mrs. Burrows. “Her young man come and took her up to Lon’on o’ Saturday,” said the woman.

Fenwick heard the words, but Mrs. Brattle did not hear them. It did not occur to him not to believe the woman’s statement, and all his hopes about the poor creature were at once dashed to the ground.

His first feeling was no doubt one of resentment, that she had broken her word to him. She had said that she would not go within a month without letting him know that she was going; and there is no fault, no vice, that strikes any of us so strongly as falsehood or injustice against ourselves. And then the nature of the statement was too terrible! She had gone back into utter degradation and iniquity. And who was the young man? As far as he could obtain a clue, through the information which had reached him from various sources, this young man must be the companion of the Grinder in the murder and robbery of Mr. Trumbull. "She has gone away, Mrs. Brattle," said he, with as sad a voice as ever a man used.

"And where be she gone to, Mr. Fenwick? Cannot I go after her?" He simply shook his head and took her by the arm to lead her away. "Do they know nothing of her, Mr. Fenwick?"

"She has gone away; probably to London. We must think no more about her, Mrs. Brattle—at any rate for the present. I can only say that I am very, very sorry that I brought you here."

The drive back to Bullhampton was very silent and very sad. Mrs. Brattle had before her the difficulty of explaining her journey to her husband, together with the feeling that the difficulty had been incurred altogether for nothing. As for Fenwick, he was angry with himself for his own past enthusiasm about the girl. After all, Mr. Chamberlaine had shown himself to be the wiser man of the two. He had declared it to be no good to take up special cases, and the Vicar as he drove himself home notified to himself his assent with the Prebendary's doctrine. The girl had gone off the moment she had ascertained that her friends were

aware of her presence and situation. What to her had been the kindness of her clerical friend, or the stories brought to her from her early home, or the dirt and squalor of the life which she was leading? The moment that there was a question of bringing her back to the decencies of the world, she escaped from her friends and hurried back to the pollution which, no doubt, had charms for her. He had allowed himself to think that in spite of her impurity, she might again be almost pure, and this was his reward! He deposited the poor woman at the spot at which he had taken her up, almost without a word, and then drove himself home with a heavy heart. "I believe it will be best to be like her father, and never to name her again," said he to his wife.

"But what has she done, Frank?"

"Gone back to the life which I suppose she likes best. Let us say no more about it,—at any rate for the present. I'm sick at heart when I think of it."

Mrs. Brattle, when she got over the stile close to her own home, saw her husband standing at the mill door. Her heart sank within her, if that could be said to sink which was already so low. He did not move, but stood there with his eyes fixed upon her. She had hoped that she might get into the house unobserved by him, and learn from Fanny what had taken place; but she felt so like a culprit that she hardly dared to enter the door. Would it not be best to go to him at once, and ask his pardon for what she had done? When he spoke to her, which he did at last, his voice was a relief to her. "Where hast been, Maggie?" he asked. She went up to him, put her hand on the lappet of his coat and shook her head. "Best go in and sit easy, and bear what God sends," he said.

"What's the use of scouring about the country here and there?"

"There has been no use in it to-day, feyther," she said.

"There arn't no use in it,—not never," he said; and after that there was no more about it. She went into the house and handed the bundle to Fanny, and sat down on the bed and cried. On the following morning Frank Fenwick received the following letter:

"London, Sunday.

"HONOURED SIR,

"I told you that I would write if it came as I was going away, but I've been forced to go without writing. There was nothing to write with at the cottage. Mrs. Burrows and me had words, and I thought as she would rob me, and perhaps worse. She is a bad woman, and I could stand it no longer, so I just come up here, as there was nowhere else for me to find a place to lie down in. I thought I'd just write and tell you, because of my word; but I know it isn't no use.

"I'd send my respects and love to father and mother, if I dared. I did think of going over; but I know he'd kill me, and so he ought. I'd send my respects to Mrs. Fenwick, only that I isn't fit to name her;—and my love to sister Fanny. I've come away here, and must just wait till I die.

"Yours humbly, and most unfortunate,

"CARRY.

"If it's any good to be sorry, nobody can be more sorry than me, and nobody more unhappy. I did try to pray when you was gone, but it only made me more ashamed. If there was only anywhere to go to, I'd go."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BULL AT LORING

GILMORE had told his friend that he would do two things,—that he would start off and travel for four or five years, and that he would pay a visit to Loring. Fenwick had advised him to do neither, but to stay at home and dig and say his prayers. But in such emergencies no man takes his friend's advice; and when Mr. Chamberlaine had left him, Gilmore had made up his mind that he would at any rate go to Loring. He went to church on the Sunday morning, and was half resolved to tell Mrs. Fenwick of his purpose; but chance delayed her in the church, and he sauntered away home without having mentioned it. He let half the next week pass by without stirring beyond his own ground. During those three days he changed his mind half a dozen times; but at last, on the Thursday, he had his portmanteau packed and started on his journey. As he was preparing to leave the house he wrote one line to Fenwick in pencil. "I am this moment off to Loring.—H. G." This he left in the village as he drove through to the Westbury station.

He had formed no idea in his own mind of any definite purpose in going. He did not know what he should do or what say when he got to Loring. He had told himself a hundred times that any persecution of the girl on his part would be mean and unworthy of him. And he was also aware that no condition in which a man could place himself was more open to

contempt than that of a whining, pining, unsuccessful lover. A man is bound to take a woman's decision against him, bear it as he may, and say as little against it as possible. He is bound to do so when he is convinced that a woman's decision is final; and there can be no stronger proof of such finality than the fact that she has declared a preference for some other man. All this Gilmore knew, but he would not divest himself of the idea that there might still be some turn in the wheel of fortune. He had heard a vague rumour that Captain Marrable, his rival, was a very dangerous man. His uncle was quite sure that the Captain's father was thoroughly bad, and had thrown out hints against the son, which Gilmore in his anxiety magnified till he felt convinced that the girl whom he loved with all his heart was going to throw herself into the arms of a thorough scamp. Could he not do something, if not for his own sake, then for hers? Might it not be possible for him to deliver her from her danger? What, if he should discover some great iniquity;—would she not then in her gratitude be softened towards him? It was on the cards that this reprobate was married already, and was about to commit bigamy. It was quite probable that such a man should be deeply in debt. As for the fortune that had been left to him, Mr. Chamberlaine, had already ascertained that that amounted to nothing. It had been consumed to the last shilling in paying the joint debts of the father and son. Men such as Mr. Chamberlaine have sources of information which are marvellous to the minds of those who are more secluded, and not the less marvellous because the information is invariably false. Gilmore in this way almost came to a conviction that Mary Lowther was about to sacrifice herself to a man utterly unworthy of

her, and he taught himself, not to think,—but to believe it to be possible that he might save her. Those who knew him would have said that he was the last man in the world to be carried away by a romantic notion;—but he had his own idea of romance as plainly developed in his mind as was ever the case with a knight of old, who went forth for the relief of a distressed damsel. If he could do anything towards saving her, he would do it, or try to do it, though he should be brought to ruin in the attempt. Might it not be that at last he would have the reward which other knights always attained? The chance in his favour was doubtless small, but the world was nothing to him without this chance.

He had never been at Loring before, but he had learned the way. He went to Chippenham and Swindon, and then by the train to Loring. He had no very definite plan formed for himself. He rather thought that he would call at Miss Marrable's house,—call if possible when Mary Lowther was not there,—and learn from the elder lady something of the facts of the case. He had been well aware for many weeks past, from early days in the summer, that old Miss Marrable had been in favour of his claim. He had heard too that there had been family quarrels among the Marrables, and a word had been dropped in his hearing by Mrs. Fenwick, which had implied that Miss Marrable was by no means pleased with the match which her niece Mary Lowther was proposing to herself. Everything seemed to show that Captain Marrable was a most undesirable person.

When he reached the station at Loring it was incumbent on him to go somewhither at once. He must provide for himself for the night. He found two omni-

buses at the station, and two inn servants competing with great ardour for his carpet bag. There were the Dragon and the Bull fighting for him. The Bull in the Lowtown was commercial and prosperous. The Dragon at Uphill was aristocratic, devoted to county purposes, and rather hard set to keep its jaws open and its tail flying. Prosperity is always becoming more prosperous, and the allurements of the Bull prevailed. "Are you a going to rob the gent of his walise?" said the indignant Boots of the Bull as he rescued Mr. Gilmore's property from the hands of his natural enemy, as soon as he had secured the entrance of Mr. Gilmore into his own vehicle. Had Mr. Gilmore known that the Dragon was next door but one to Miss Marrable's house, and that the Bull was nearly equally contiguous to that in which Captain Marrable was residing, his choice probably would not have been altered. In such cases, the knight who is to be the deliverer desires above all things that he may be near to his enemy.

He was shown up to a bedroom, and then ushered into the commercial room of the house. Loring, though it does a very pretty trade as a small town, and now has for some years been regarded as a thriving place in its degree, is not of such importance in the way of business as to support a commercial inn of the first class. At such houses the commercial room is as much closed against the uninitiated as is a first-class club in London. In such rooms a non-commercial man would be almost as much astray as is a non-broker in Capel Court, or an attorney in a bar mess-room. At the Bull things were a little mixed. The very fact that the words "Commercial Room" were painted on the door proved to those who understood such matters that there was a doubt in the case. They had no coffee room at

the Bull, and strangers who came that way were of necessity shown into that in which the gentlemen of the road were wont to relax themselves. Certain commercial laws are maintained in such apartments. Cigars are not allowed before nine o'clock, except upon some distinct arrangement with the waiter. There is not, as a rule, a regular daily commercial repast; but when three or more gentlemen dine together at five o'clock, the dinner becomes a commercial dinner, and the commercial laws as to wine, etc., are enforced, with more or less restriction as circumstances may seem to demand. At the present time there was but one occupant of the chamber to greet Mr. Gilmore when he entered, and this meeting was made with all the full honours of commercial courtesy. The commercial gentleman is of his nature gregarious, and although he be exclusive to a strong degree, more so probably than almost any other man in regard to the sacred hour of dinner, when in the full glory of his confraternity, he will condescend, when the circumstances of his profession have separated him from his professional brethren, to be festive with almost any gentleman whom chance may throw in his way. Mr. Cockey had been alone for a whole day when Gilmore arrived, having reached Loring just twenty-four hours in advance of our friend, and was contemplating the sadly diminished joys of a second solitary dinner at the Bull, when fortune threw this stranger in his way. The waiter, looking at the matter in a somewhat similar light, and aware that a combined meal would be for the advantage of all parties, very soon assisted Mr. Cockey in making his arrangements for the evening. Mr. Gilmore would no doubt want to dine. Dinner would be served at five o'clock. Mr. Cockey was going to dine, and Mr. Gil-

more, the waiter thought, would probably be glad to join him. Mr. Cockey expressed himself as delighted, and would only be too happy. Now men in love, let their case be ever so bad, must dine or die. So much no doubt is not admitted by the chroniclers of the old knights who went forth after their ladies; but the old chroniclers, if they soared somewhat higher than do those of the present day, are admitted to have been on the whole less circumstantially truthful. Our knight was very sad at heart, and would have done according to his prowess as much as any Orlando of them all for the lady whom he loved,—but nevertheless he was an hungered; the mention of dinner was pleasant to him, and he accepted the joint courtesies of Mr. Cockey and the waiter with gratitude.

The codfish and beefsteak, though somewhat woolly and tough, were wholesome; and the pint of sherry which at Mr. Cockey's suggestion was supplied to them, if not of itself wholesome, was innocent by reason of its dimensions. Mr. Cockey himself was pleasant and communicative, and told Mr. Gilmore a good deal about Loring. Our friend was afraid to ask any leading questions as to the persons in the place who interested himself, feeling conscious that his own subject was one which would not bear touch from a rough hand. He did at last venture to make inquiry about the clergyman of the parish. Mr. Cockey, with some merriment at his own wit, declared that the church was a house of business at which he did not often call for orders. Though he had been coming to Loring now for four years, he had never heard anything of the clergyman; but the waiter no doubt would tell them. Gilmore rather hesitated, and protested that he cared little for the matter; but the waiter was called in and questioned,

and was soon full of stories about old Mr. Marrable. He was a good sort of man in his way, the waiter thought, but not much of a preacher. The people liked him because he never interfered with them. "He don't go poking his nose into people's 'ouses like some of 'em," said the waiter, who then began to tell of the pertinacity in that respect of a younger clergyman at Uphill. Yes; Parson Marrable had a relation living at Uphill; an old lady. "No; not his grandmother." This was in answer to a joke on the part of Mr. Cockey. Nor yet a daughter. The waiter thought she was some kind of a cousin, though he did not know what kind. A very grand lady was Miss Marrable, according to his showing, and much thought of by the quality. There was a young lady living with her, though the waiter did not know the young lady's name.

"Does the Rev. Mr. Marrable live alone?" asked Gilmore. "Well, yes; for the most part quite alone. But just at present he had a visitor." Then the waiter told all that he knew about the Captain. The most material part of this was that the Captain had returned from London that very evening;—had come in by the Express while the two "gents" were at dinner, and had been taken to the Lowtown parsonage by the Bull 'bus. "Quite the gentleman," was the Captain, according to the waiter, and one of the "handsomest gents as ever he'd set his eyes upon." "D— him," said poor Harry Gilmore to himself. Then he ventured upon another question. Did the waiter know anything of Captain Marrable's father? The waiter only knew that the Captain's father was "a military gent, and was high up in the army." From all which the only information which Gilmore received was the fact that the match between Marrable and Mary Lowther had not as

yet become the talk of the town. After dinner Mr. Cockey proposed a glass of toddy and a cigar, remarking that he would move a bill for dispensing with the smoking rule for that night only, and to this also Gilmore assented. Now that he was at Loring he did not know what to do with himself better than drinking toddy with Mr. Cockey. Mr. Cockey declared the bill to be carried *nem. con.*, and the cigars and toddy were produced. Mr. Cockey remarked that he had heard of Sir Gregory Marrable, of Dunripple Park. He travelled in Warwickshire, and was in the habit, as he said, of fishing up little facts. Sir Gregory wasn't much of a man, according to his account. The estate was small and, as Mr. Cockey fancied, a little out at elbows. Mr. Cockey thought it all very well to be a country gentleman and a "barrow knight," as he called it, as long as you had an estate to follow; but he thought very little of a title without plenty of stuff. Commerce, according to his notions, was the backbone of the nation;—and that the corps of travelling commercial gentlemen was the backbone of trade, every child knew. Mr. Cockey became warm and friendly as he drank his toddy. "Now, I don't know what you are, sir," he said.

"I'm not very much of anything," said Gilmore.

"Perhaps not, sir. Let that be as it may. But a man, sir, that feels that he's one of the supports of the commercial supremacy of this nation ain't got much reason to be ashamed of himself."

"Not on that account, certainly."

"Nor yet on no other account, as long as he's true to his employers. Now you talk of country gentlemen."

"I didn't talk of them," said Gilmore.

"Well,—no,—you didn't; but they do, you know. What does a country gentleman know, and what does he do? What's the country the better of him? He 'unts, and he shoots, and he goes to bed with his skin full of wine, and then he gets up and he 'unts and he shoots again, and 'as his skin full once more. That's about all."

"Sometimes he's a magistrate."

"Yes, justices' justice! we know all about that. Put an old man in prison for a week because he looks into his 'ay-field on a Sunday; or send a young one to the treadmill for two months because he knocks over a 'are. All them cases ought to be tried in the towns, and there should be beaks paid as there is in London. I don't see the good of a country gentleman. Buying and selling;—that's what the world has to go by."

"They buy and sell land."

"No; they don't. They buy a bit now and then when they're screws, and they sell a bit now and then when the eating and drinking has gone too fast. But as for capital and investment, they know nothing about it. After all, they ain't getting above two-and-a-half per cent. for their money. We all know what that must come to."

Mr. Cockey had been so mild before the pint of sherry and the glass of toddy, that Mr. Gilmore was somewhat dismayed by the change. Mr. Cockey, however, in his altered aspect seemed to be so much the less gracious, that Gilmore left him and strolled out into the town. He climbed up the hill and walked round the church and looked up at the windows of Miss Marrable's house, of which he had learned the site; but he had no adventure, saw nothing that in-

terested him, and at half-past nine took himself wearily to bed.

That same day Captain Marrable had run down from London to Loring laden with terrible news. The money on which he had counted was all gone! "What do you mean?" said his uncle; "have the lawyers been deceiving you all through?"

"What is it to me?" said the ruined man. "It is all gone. They have satisfied me that nothing more can be done." Parson John whistled with a long-drawn note of wonder. "The people they were dealing with would be willing enough to give up the money, but it's all gone. It's spent, and there's no trace of it."

"Poor fellow!"

"I've seen my father, Uncle John."

"And what passed?"

"I told him that he was a scoundrel, and then I left him. I didn't strike him."

"I should hope not that, Walter."

"I kept my hands off him; but when a man has ruined you, as he has me, it doesn't much matter who he is. Your father and any other man are much the same to you then. He was worn, and old, and pale, or I should have felled him to the ground."

"And what will you do now?"

"Just go to that hell upon earth on the other side of the globe. There's nothing else to be done. I've applied for extension of leave, and told them why."

Nothing more was said that night between the uncle and nephew, and no word had been spoken about Mary Lowther. On the next morning the breakfast at the parsonage passed by in silence. Parson John had been thinking a good deal of Mary, but had resolved

that it was best that he should hold his tongue for the present. From the moment in which he had first heard of the engagement, he had made up his mind that his nephew and Mary Lowther would never be married. Seeing what his nephew was,—or rather seeing that which he fancied his nephew to be,—he was sure that he would not sacrifice himself by such a marriage. There was always a way out of things, and Walter Marrable would be sure to find it. The way out of it had been found now with a vengeance. Immediately after breakfast the Captain took his hat without a word, and walked steadily up the hill to Uphill Lane. As he passed the door of the Bull he saw, but took no notice of, a gentleman who was standing under the covered entrance to the inn, and who had watched him coming out from the parsonage gate; but Gilmore, the moment that his eyes fell upon the Captain, declared to himself that that was his rival. Captain Marrable walked straight up the hill and knocked at Miss Marrable's door. Was Miss Lowther at home? Of course Miss Lowther was at home at such an hour. The girl said that Miss Mary was alone in the breakfast parlour. Miss Marrable had already gone down to the kitchen. Without waiting for another word, he walked into the little back room, and there he found his love. "Walter," she said, jumping up and running to him; "how good of you to come so soon! We didn't expect you these two days." She had thrown herself into his arms, but, though he embraced her, he did not kiss her. "There is something the matter!" she said. "What is it?" As she spoke she drew away from him and looked up into his face. He smiled and shook his head, still holding her by the waist. "Tell me, Walter; I know there is something wrong."

"It is only that dirty money. My father has succeeded in getting it all."

"All, Walter?" said she, again drawing herself away.

"Every shilling," said he, dropping his arm.

"That will be very bad."

"Not a doubt of it. I felt it just as you do."

"And all our pretty plans are gone."

"Yes;—all our pretty plans."

"And what shall you do now?"

"There is only one thing. I shall go to India again. Of course it is just the same to me as though I were told that sentence of death had gone against me;—only it will not be so soon over."

"Don't say that, Walter."

"Why not say it, my dear, when I feel it?"

"But you don't feel it. I know it must be bad for you, but it is not quite that. I will not think that you have nothing left worth living for."

"I can't ask you to go with me to that happy Paradise."

"But I can ask you to take me," she said;—"though perhaps it will be better that I should not."

"My darling!—my own darling!" Then she came back to him and laid her head upon his shoulder, and lifted his hand till it came again round her waist. And he kissed her forehead, and smoothed her hair. "Swear to me," she said, "that whatever happens you will not put me away from you."

"Put you away, dearest! A man doesn't put away the only morsel he has to keep him from starving. But yet as I came up here this morning I resolved that I would put you away."

"Walter!"

"And even now I know that they will tell me that I should do so. How can I take you out there to such a life as that without having the means of keeping a house over your head?"

"Officers do marry without fortunes."

"Yes;—and what sort of a time do their wives have? Oh, Mary, my own, my own, my own!—it is very bad! You cannot understand it all at once, but it is very bad."

"If it be better for you, Walter,——" she said, again drawing herself away.

"It is not that, and do not say that it is. Let us at any rate trust each other."

She gave herself a little shake before she answered him. "I will trust you in everything;—as God is my judge, in everything. What you tell me to do, I will do. But, Walter, I will say one thing first. I can look forward to nothing but absolute misery in any life that will separate me from you. I know the difference between comfort and discomfort in money matters, but all that is as a feather in the balance. You are my god upon earth, and to you I must cling. Whether you be away from me or with me, I must cling to you the same. If I am to be separated from you for a time, I can do it with hope. If I am to be separated from you for ever, I shall still do so,—with despair. And now I will trust you, and I will do whatever you tell me. If you forbid me to call you mine any longer,—I will obey, and will never reproach you."

"I will always be yours," he said, taking her again to his heart.

"Then, dearest, you shall not find me wanting for anything you may ask of me. Of course you can't decide at present."

"I have decided that I must go to India. I have asked for the exchange."

"Yes;—I understand; but about our marriage. It may be that you should go out first. I would not be unmaidenly, Walter; but remember this—the sooner the better, if I can be a comfort to you;—but I can bear any delay rather than be a clog upon you."

Marrable, as he had walked up the hill,—and during all his thoughts, indeed, since he had been convinced that the money was gone from him,—had been disposed to think that his duty to Mary required him to give her up. He had asked her to be his wife when he believed his circumstances to be other than they were; and now he knew that the life he had to offer to her was one of extreme discomfort. He had endeavoured to shake off any idea that as he must go back to India it would be more comfortable for himself to return without than with a wife. He wanted to make the sacrifice of himself, and had determined that he would do so. Now, at any rate for the moment, all his resolves were thrown to the wind. His own love was so strong and was so gratified by her love, that half his misery was carried away in an enthusiasm of romantic devotion. Let the worst come to the worst, the man that was so loved by such a woman could not be of all men the most miserable.

He left the house, giving to her the charge of telling the bad news to Miss Marrable; and as he went he saw in the street before the house the man whom he had seen standing an hour before under the gateway of the inn. And Gilmore saw him too, and well knew where he had been.

CHAPTER XXX

THE AUNT AND THE UNCLE

MISS MARRABLE heard the story of the Captain's loss in perfect silence. Mary told it craftily, with a smile on her face, as though she were but slightly affected by it, and did not think very much on the change it might effect in her plans and those of her lover. "He has been ill-treated; has he not?" she said.

"Very badly treated. I can't understand it, but it seems to me that he has been most shamefully treated."

"He tried to explain it all to me; but I don't know that he succeeded."

"Why did the lawyers deceive him?"

"I think he was a little rash there. He took what they told him for more than it was worth. There was some woman who said that she would resign her claim; but when they came to look into it, she too had signed some papers and the money was all gone. He could recover it from his father by law, only that his father has got nothing."

"And that is to be the end of it."

"That is the end of our five thousand pounds," said Mary, forcing a little laugh. Miss Marrable for a few moments made no reply. She sat fidgety in her seat, feeling that it was her duty to explain to Mary what must, in her opinion, be the inevitable result of this misfortune, and yet not knowing how to begin her task. Mary was partly aware of what was coming, and

had fortified herself to reject all advice, to assert her right to do as she pleased with herself, and to protest that she cared nothing for the prudent views of worldly-minded people. But she was afraid of what was coming. She knew that arguments would be used which she would find it very difficult to answer; and, although she had settled upon certain strong words which she would speak, she felt that she would be driven at last to quarrel with her aunt. On one thing she was quite resolved. Nothing should induce her to give up her engagement,—short of the expression of a wish to that effect from Walter Marrable himself.

“How will this affect you, dear?” said Miss Marrable at last.

“I should have been a poor man’s wife anyhow. Now I shall be the wife of a very poor man. I suppose that will be the effect.”

“What will he do?”

“He has, aunt, made up his mind to go to India.”

“Has he made up his mind to anything else?”

“Of course, I know what you mean, aunt?”

“Why should you not know? I mean, that a man going out to India, and intending to live there as an officer on his pay, cannot be in want of a wife.”

“You speak of a wife as if she were the same as a coach-and-four, of a box at the opera,—a sort of luxury for rich men. Marriage, aunt, is like death, common to all.”

“In our position in life, Mary, marriage cannot be made so common as to be undertaken without foresight for the morrow. A poor gentleman is further removed from marriage than any other man.”

“One knows, of course, that there will be difficulties.”

"What I mean, Mary, is, that you will have to give it up."

"Never, Aunt Sarah. I shall never give it up."

"Do you mean that you will marry him now, at once, and go out to India with him, as a dead weight round his neck?"

"I mean that he shall choose about that."

"It is for you to choose, Mary. Don't be angry. I am bound to tell you what I think. You can, of course, act as you please; but I think that you ought to listen to me. He cannot go back from his engagement without laying himself open to imputation of bad conduct."

"Nor can I."

"Pardon me, dear. That depends, I think, upon what passes between you. It is at any rate for you to propose the release to him,—not to fix him with the burthen of proposing it." Mary's heart quailed as she heard this, but she did not show her feeling by any expression on her face. "For a man, placed as he is, about to return to such a climate as that of India, with such work before him as I suppose men have there,—the burthen of a wife, without the means of maintaining her according to his views of life and hers——"

"We have no views of life. We know that we shall be poor."

"It is the old story of love and a cottage,—only under the most unfavourable circumstances. A woman's view of it is, of course, different from that of a man. He has seen more of the world, and knows better than she does what poverty and a wife and family mean."

"There is no reason why we should be married at once."

"A long engagement for you would be absolutely disastrous."

"Of course, there is disaster," said Mary. "The loss of Walter's money is disastrous. One has to put up with disaster. But the worst of all disasters would be to be separated. I can stand anything but that."

"It seems to me, Mary, that within the last few weeks your character has become altogether altered."

"Of course it has."

"You used to think so much more of other people than yourself."

"Don't I think of him, Aunt Sarah?"

"As of a thing of your own. Two months ago you did not know him, and now you are a millstone round his neck."

"I will never be a millstone round anybody's neck," said Mary, walking out of the room. She felt that her aunt had been very cruel to her,—had attacked her in her misery without mercy; and yet she knew that every word that had been uttered had been spoken in pure affection. She did not believe that her aunt's chief purpose had been to save Walter from the fruits of an imprudent marriage. Had she so believed, the words would have had more effect on her. She saw, or thought that she saw, that her aunt was trying to save herself against her own will, and at this she was indignant. She was determined to persevere; and this endeavour to make her feel that her perseverance would be disastrous to the man she loved was, she thought, very cruel. She stalked upstairs with unruffled demeanour; but when there, she threw herself on her bed and sobbed bitterly. Could it be that it was her duty, for his sake, to tell him that the whole thing

should be at an end? It was impossible for her to do so now, because she had sworn to him that she would be guided altogether by him in his present troubles. She must keep her word to him, whatever happened; but of this she was quite sure,—that if he should show the slightest sign of a wish to be free from his engagement, she would make him free—at once. She would make him free, and would never allow herself to think for a moment that he had been wrong. She had told him what her own feelings were very plainly,—perhaps, in her enthusiasm, too plainly,—and now he must judge for himself and for her. In respect to her aunt, she would endeavour to avoid any further conversation on the subject till her lover should have decided finally what would be best for both of them. If he should choose to say that everything between them should be over, she would acquiesce,—and all the world should be over for her at the same time.

While this was going on in Uphill Lane something of the same kind was taking place at the Lowtown Parsonage. Parson John became aware that his nephew had been with the ladies at Uphill, and when the young man came in for lunch, he asked some question which introduced the subject. “You’ve told them of this fresh trouble, no doubt?”

“I didn’t see Miss Marrable,” said the Captain.

“I don’t know that Miss Marrable much signifies. You haven’t asked Miss Marrable to be your wife.”

“I saw Mary, and I told her.”

“I hope you made no bones about it.”

“I don’t know what you mean, sir.”

“I hope you told her that you two had had your little game of play, like two children, and that there must be an end of it.”

"No; I didn't tell her that."

"That's what you have got to tell her in some kind of language, and the sooner you do it the better. Of course you can't marry her. You couldn't have done it if this money had been all right, and it's out of the question now. Bless my soul! how you would hate each other before six months were over. I can understand that for a strong fellow like you, when he's used to it, India may be a jolly place enough."

"It's a great deal more than I can understand."

"But for a poor man with a wife and family;—oh dear! it must be very bad indeed. And neither of you have ever been used to that kind of thing."

"I have not," said the Captain.

"Nor has she. That old lady up there is not rich, but she is as proud as Lucifer, and always lives as though the whole place belonged to her. She's a good manager, and she don't run in debt;—but Mary Lowther knows no more of roughing it than a duchess."

"I hope I may never have to teach her."

"I trust you never may. It's a very bad lesson for a young man to have to teach a young woman. Some women die in the learning. Some won't learn it at all. Others do, and become dirty and rough themselves. Now, you are very particular about women."

"I like to see them well turned out."

"What would you think of your own wife, nursing perhaps a couple of babies, dressed nohow when she gets up in the morning, and going on in the same way till night? That's the kind of life with officers who marry on their pay. I don't say anything against it. If the man likes it,—or rather if he's able to put up with it,—it may be all very well; but you couldn't put up with it. Mary's very nice now, but you'd come to

be so sick of her, that you'd feel half like cutting her throat,—or your own."

"It would be the latter for choice, sir."

"I dare say it would. But even that isn't a pleasant thing to look forward to. I'll tell you the truth about it, my boy. When you first came to me and told me that you were going to marry Mary Lowther, I knew it could not be. It was no business of mine; but I knew it could not be. Such engagements always get themselves broken off somehow. Now and again there are a pair of fools who go through with it;—but for the most part it's a matter of kissing and lovers' vows for a week or two."

"You seem to know all about it, Uncle John."

"I haven't lived to be seventy without knowing something, I suppose. And now here you are without a shilling. I dare say, if the truth were known, you've a few debts here and there."

"I may owe three or four hundred pounds or so."

"As much as a year's income;—and you talk of marrying a girl without a farthing."

"She has twelve hundred pounds."

"Just enough to pay your own debts, and take you out to India,—so that you may start without a penny. Is that the sort of career that will suit you, Walter? Can you trust yourself to that kind of thing, with a wife under your arm? If you were a man of fortune, no doubt Mary would make a very nice wife; but, as it is,—you must give it up."

Whereupon Captain Marrable lit a pipe and took himself into the parson's garden, thence into the stables and stable-yard, and again back to the garden, thinking of all this. There was not a word spoken by Parson John which Walter did not know to be true. He had

already come to the conclusion that he must go out to India before he married. As for marrying Mary at once and taking her with him this winter, that was impossible. He must go and look about him;—and as he thought of this he was forced to acknowledge to himself that he regarded the delay as a reprieve. The sooner the better had been Mary's view with him. Though he was loath enough to entertain the idea of giving her up, he was obliged to confess that, like the condemned man, he desired a long day. There was nothing happy before him in the whole prospect of his life. Of course he loved Mary. He loved her very dearly. He loved her so dearly, that to have her taken from him would be to have his heart plucked asunder. So he swore to himself;—and yet he was in doubt whether it would not be better that his heart should be plucked asunder, than that she should be made to live in accordance with those distasteful pictures which his uncle had drawn for him. Of himself he would not think at all. Everything must be bad for him. What happiness could a man expect who had been misused, cheated, and ruined by his own father? For himself it did not much matter what became of him; but he began to doubt whether for Mary's sake it would not be well that they should be separated. And then Mary had thrust upon him the whole responsibility of a decision!

CHAPTER XXXI

MARY LOWTHER FEELS HER WAY

THAT afternoon there came down to the parsonage a note from Mary to the Captain, asking her lover to meet her, and walk with her before dinner. He met her, and they took their accustomed stroll along the towing-path and into the fields. Mary had thought much of her aunt's words before the note was written, and had a fixed purpose of her own in view. It was true enough that though she loved this man with all her heart and soul, so loved him that she could not look forward to life apart from him without seeing that such life would be a great blank, yet she was aware that she hardly knew him. We are apt to suppose that love should follow personal acquaintance; and yet love at third sight is probably as common as any love at all, and it takes a great many sights before one human being can know another. Years are wanted to make a friendship, but days suffice for men and women to get married. Mary was, after a fashion, aware that she had been too quick in giving away her heart, and that now, when the gift had been made in full, it became her business to learn what sort of man was he to whom she had given it. And it was not only his nature as it affected her, but his nature as it affected himself that she must study. She did not doubt but that he was good, and true, and noble-minded; but it might be possible that a man good, true, and noble-minded, might have lived with so many indulgences around him

as to be unable to achieve the constancy of heart which would be necessary for such a life as that which would be now before them if they married. She had told him that he should decide for himself and for her also,—thus throwing upon him the responsibility, and throwing upon him also, very probably, the necessity of a sacrifice. She had meant to be generous and trusting; but it might be that of all courses that which she had adopted was the least generous. In order that she might put this wrong right, if there were a wrong, she had asked him to come and walk with her. They met at the usual spot, and she put her hand through his arm with her accustomed smile, leaning upon him somewhat heavily for a minute, as girls do when they want to show that they claim the arm that they lean on as their own.

“Have you told Parson John?” said Mary.

“Oh, yes.”

“And what does he say?”

“Just what a crabbed, crafty, selfish old bachelor of seventy would be sure to say.”

“You mean that he has told you to give up all idea of comforting yourself with a wife.”

“Just that.”

“And Aunt Sarah has been saying exactly the same to me. You can't think how eloquent Aunt Sarah has been. And her energy has quite surprised me.”

“I don't think Aunt Sarah was ever much of a friend of mine,” said the Captain.

“Not in the way of matrimony; in other respects she approves of you highly, and is rather proud of you as a Marrable. If you were only heir to the title, or something of that kind, she would think you the finest fellow going.”

"I wish I could gratify her, with all my heart."

"She is such a dear old creature! You don't know her in the least, Walter. I am told she was ever so pretty when she was a girl; but she had no fortune of her own at that time, and she didn't care to marry beneath her position. You musn't abuse her."

"I've not abused her."

"What she has been saying I am sure is very true; and I dare say Parson John has been saying the same thing."

"If she has caused you to change your mind, say so at once, Mary. I shan't complain."

Mary pressed his arm involuntarily, and loved him so dearly for the little burst of wrath. Was it really true that he, too, had set his heart upon it?—that all that the crafty old uncle had said had been of no avail?—that he also loved so well that he was willing to change the whole course of his life and become another person for the sake of her? If it were so, she would not say a word that could by possibility make him think that she was afraid. She would feel her way carefully, so that he might not be led by a chance phrase to imagine that what she was about to say was said on her own behalf. She would be very careful, but at the same time she would be so explicit that there should be no doubt on his mind but that he had her full permission to retire from the engagement if he thought it best to do so. She was quite ready to share the burthens of life with him, let them be what they might; but she would not be a millstone round his neck. At any rate, he should not be weighted with the millstone, if he himself looked upon a loving wife in that light.

"She has not caused me to change my mind at all, Walter. Of course I know that all this is very serious.

I knew that without Aunt Sarah's telling me. After all, Aunt Sarah can't be so wise as you ought to be, who have seen India and who know it well."

"India is not a nice place to live in—especially for women."

"I don't know that Loring is very nice—but one has to take that as it comes. Of course it would be nicer if you could live at home and have plenty of money. I wish I had a fortune of my own. I never cared for it before, but I do now."

"Things don't come by wishing, Mary."

"No; but things do come by resolving and struggling. I have no doubt but that you will live yet to do something and to be somebody. I have that faith in you. But I can well understand that a wife may be a great impediment in your way."

"I don't want to think of myself at all."

"But you must think of yourself. For a woman, after all, it doesn't matter much. She isn't expected to do anything particular. A man of course must look to his own career, and take care that he does nothing to mar it."

"I don't quite understand what you're driving at," said the Captain.

"Well;—I'm driving at this: that I think that you are bound to decide upon doing that which you feel to be wisest without reference to my feelings. Of course I love you better than anything in the world. I can't be so false as to say it isn't so. Indeed, to tell the truth, I don't know that I really ever loved anybody else. But if it is proper that we should be separated, I shall get over it,—in a way."

"You mean you'd marry somebody else in the process of time."

"No, Walter; I don't mean that. Women shouldn't make protestations; but I don't think I ever should. But a woman can live and get on very well without being married, and I should always have you in my heart, and I should try to comfort myself with remembering that you had loved me."

"I am quite sure that I shall never marry anyone else," said the Captain.

"You know what I'm driving at now;—eh, Walter?"

"Partly."

"I want you to know wholly. I told you this morning that I should leave it to you to decide. I still say the same. I consider myself for the present as much bound to obey you as though I were your wife already. But after saying that, and after hearing Aunt Mary's sermon, I felt that I ought to make you understand that I am quite aware that it may be impossible for you to keep to your engagement. You understand all that better than I do. Our engagement was made when you thought you had money, and even then you felt that there was little enough."

"It was very little."

"And now there is none. I don't profess to be afraid of poverty myself, because I don't quite know what it means."

"It means something very unpleasant."

"No doubt; and it would be unpleasant to be parted;—wouldn't it?"

"It would be horrible."

She pressed his arm again as she went on. "You must judge between the two. What I want you to understand is this, that whatever you may judge to be right and best, I will agree to it, and will think that it is right and best. If you say that we will get ourselves

married and try it, I shall feel that not to get ourselves married and not to try it is a manifest impossibility; and if you say that we should be wrong to get married and try it, then I will feel that to have done so was quite a manifest impossibility."

"Mary," said he, "you're an angel."

"No; but I'm a woman who loves well enough to be determined not to hurt the man she loves if she can help it."

"There is one thing on which I think I must decide."

"What is that?"

"I must at any rate go out before we are married." Mary Lowther felt this to be a decision in her favour,—to be a decision which for the time made her happier and light-hearted. She had so dreaded a positive and permanent separation, that the delay seemed to her to be hardly an evil.

CHAPTER XXXII

MR. GILMORE'S SUCCESS

HARRY GILMORE, the prosperous country gentleman, the county magistrate, the man of acres, the nephew of Mr. Chamberlaine, respected by all who knew him,—with the single exception of the Marquis of Trowbridge,—was now so much reduced that he felt himself to be an inferior being to Mr. Cockey, with whom he breakfasted. He had come to Loring, and now he was there he did not know what to do with himself. He had come there, in truth, not because he really thought he could do any good, but driven out of his home by sheer misery. He was a man altogether upset, and verging on to a species of insanity. He was so uneasy in his mind that he could read nothing. He was half-ashamed of being looked at by those who knew him; and had felt some relief in the society of Mr. Cockey until Mr. Cockey had become jovial with wine, simply because Mr. Cockey was so poor a creature that he felt no fear for him. But as he had come to Loring, it was necessary that he should do something. He could not come to Loring and go back again without saying a word to anybody. Fenwick would ask him questions, and the truth would come out. There came upon him this morning an idea that he would not go back home;—that he would leave Loring and go away without giving any reason to any one. He was his own master. No one would be injured by anything that he might do. He had a right to spend his income as he pleased. Everything was distasteful that

reminded him of Bullhampton. But still he knew that this was no more than a madman's idea;—that it would ill become him so to act. He had duties to perform, and he must perform them, let them be ever so distasteful. It was only an idea, made to be rejected; but, nevertheless, he thought of it.

To do something, however, was incumbent on him. After breakfast he sauntered up the hill and saw Captain Marrable enter the house in which Mary Lowther lived. He felt thoroughly ashamed of himself in thus creeping about, and spying things out,—and, in truth, he had not intended thus to watch his rival. He wandered into the churchyard, sat there some time on the tombstones, and then again went down to the inn. Mr. Cockey was going to Gloucester by an afternoon train, and invited him to join an early dinner at two. He assented, though by this time he had come to hate Mr. Cockey. Mr. Cockey assumed an air of superiority, and gave his opinion about matters political and social as though his companion were considerably below him in intelligence and general information. He dictated to poor Gilmore, laid down the law as to eating onions with beefsteaks in a manner that was quite offensive. Nevertheless, the unfortunate man bore with his tormentor, and felt desolate when he was left alone in the commercial room, Cockey having gone out to complete his last round of visits to his customers. "Orders first and money afterwards," Cockey had said, and Cockey had now gone out to look after his money.

Gilmore sat for some half-hour helpless over the fire; and then starting up, snatched his hat, and hurried out of the house. He walked as quickly as he could up the hill, and rang the bell at Miss Marrable's

house. Had he been there ten minutes sooner, he would have seen Mary Lowther tripping down the side path to meet her lover. He rang the bell, and in a few minutes found himself in Miss Marrable's drawing-room. He had asked for Miss Marrable, had given his name, and had been shown upstairs. There he remained alone for a few minutes which seemed to him to be interminable. During these minutes Miss Marrable was standing in her little parlour downstairs, trying to think what she would say to Mr. Gilmore,—trying also to think why Mr. Gilmore should have come to Loring.

After a few words of greeting Miss Marrable said that Miss Lowther was out walking. "She will be very glad I'm sure, to hear good news from her friends at Bullhampton."

"They're all very well," said Mr. Gilmore.

"I've heard a great deal of Mr. Fenwick," said Miss Marrable; "so much that I seem almost to be acquainted with him."

"No doubt," said Mr. Gilmore.

"Your parish has become painfully known to the public by that horrible murder," said Miss Marrable.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Gilmore.

"I fear that they will hardly catch the perpetrator of it," said Miss Marrable.

"I fear not," said Mr. Gilmore.

At this period of the conversation Miss Marrable found herself in great difficulty. If anything was to be said about Mary Lowther, she could not begin to say it. She had heard a great deal in favour of Mr. Gilmore. Mrs. Fenwick had written to her about the man; and Mary, though she would not love him, had always spoken very highly of his qualities. She knew

well that he had gone through Oxford with credit, that he was a reading man,—so reputed, that he was a magistrate, and in all respects a gentleman. Indeed, she had formed an idea of him as quite a pearl among men. Now that she saw him, she could not repress a feeling of disappointment. He was badly dressed, and bore a sad, depressed, downtrodden aspect. His whole appearance was what the world now calls seedy, and he seemed to be almost unable to speak. Miss Marrable knew that Mr. Gilmore was a man disappointed in his love, but she did not conceive that love had done him all these injuries. Love, however, had done them all. "Are you going to stay long in this neighbourhood?" asked Miss Marrable, almost in despair for a subject.

Then the man's mouth was opened. "No; I suppose not," he said. "I don't know what should keep me here, and I hardly know why I'm come. Of course you have heard of my suit to your niece." Miss Marrable bowed her courtly little head in token of assent. "When Miss Lowther left us, she gave me some hope that I might be successful. At least, she consented that I should ask her once more. She has now written to tell me that she is engaged to her cousin."

"There is something of the kind," said Miss Marrable.

"Something of the kind! I suppose it is settled; isn't it?"

Miss Marrable was a sensible woman, not one easily led away by appearances. Nevertheless, it is probable that had Mr. Gilmore been less lugubrious, more sleek, less "seedy," she would have been more prone than she now was to have made instant use of Captain Marrable's loss of fortune on behalf of this

other suitor. She would immediately have felt that perhaps something might be done, and she would have been tempted to tell him the whole story openly. As it was she could not so sympathise with the man before her, as to take him into her confidence. No doubt he was Mr. Gilmore, the favoured friend of the Fenwicks, the owner of the Privets, and the man of whom Mary had often said that there was no fault to be found with him. But there was nothing bright about him, and she did not know how to encourage him as a lover. "As Mary has told you," she said, "I suppose there can be no harm in my repeating that they are engaged," said Miss Marrable.

"Of course they are. I am aware of that. I believe the gentleman is related to you."

"He is a cousin,—not very near."

"And I suppose he has your good will?"

"As to that, Mr. Gilmore, I don't know that I can do any good by speaking. Young ladies in these days don't marry in accordance with the wishes of their old aunts."

"But Miss Lowther thinks so much of you! I don't want to ask any questions that ought not to be asked. If this match is so settled that it must go on, why there's an end of it. I'll just tell you the truth openly, Miss Marrable. I have loved,—I do love your niece with all my heart. When I received her letter it upset me altogether, and every hour since has made the feeling worse. I have come here just to learn whether there may still possibly be a chance. You will not quarrel with me because I have loved her so well?"

"Indeed no," said Miss Marrable, whose heart was gradually becoming soft, and who was learning to forget the mud on Mr. Gilmore's boots and trousers.

"I heard that Captain Marrable was, at any rate, not a very rich man; that he could hardly afford to marry his cousin. I did hear, also, that the match might in other respects not be suitable."

"There is no other objection, Mr. Gilmore."

"It is the case, Miss Marrable, that these things sometimes come on suddenly and go off suddenly. I won't deny that if I could have gained Miss Lowther's heart without the interference of any interloper, it would have been to me a brighter joy than anything that can now be possible. A man cannot be proud of his position who seeks to win a woman who owns a preference for another man." Miss Marrable's heart had now become very soft, and she began to perceive, of her own knowledge, that Mr. Gilmore was at any rate a gentleman. "But I would take her in any way that I could get her. Perhaps—that is to say, it might be——" And then he stopped.

Should she tell him everything? She had a strong idea that it was her first duty to be true to her own sex and to her own niece. But were she to tell the man the whole story it would do her niece no harm. She still believed that the match with Captain Marrable must be broken off. Even were this done it would be very long, she thought, before Mary would bring herself to listen with patience to another suitor. But of course it would be best for them all that this episode in Mary's life should be forgotten and put out of sight as soon as possible. Had not this dangerous captain come up, Mary, no doubt,—so thought Miss Marrable,—would at last have complied with her friend's advice, and have accepted a marriage which was in all respects advantageous. If the episode could only get itself forgotten and put out of sight, she might do so still. But there must

be delay. Miss Marrable, after waiting for half a minute to consider, determined that she would tell him something. "No doubt," she said, "Captain Marrable's income is so small that the match is one that Mary's friends cannot approve."

"I don't think much of money," he said.

"Still it is essential to comfort, Mr. Gilmore."

"What I mean to say is, that I am the last man in the world to insist upon that kind of thing, or to appear to triumph because my income is larger than another man's." Miss Marrable was now quite sure that Mr. Gilmore was a gentleman. "But if the match is to be broken off——"

"I cannot say that it will be broken off."

"But it may be?"

"Certainly it is possible. There are difficulties which may necessarily separate them."

"If it be so, my feelings will be the same as they have always been since I first knew her. That is all that I have got to say."

Then she told him pretty nearly everything. She said nothing of the money which Walter Marrable would have inherited had it not been for Colonel Marrable's iniquity; but she did tell him that the young people would have no income except the Captain's pay, and poor Mary's little fifty pounds a-year; and she went on to explain that, as far as she was concerned, and as far as her cousin the clergyman was concerned, everything would be done to prevent a marriage so disastrous as that in question, and the prospect of a life with so little of allurements as that of the wife of a poor soldier in India. At the same time she bade him remember that Mary Lowther was a girl very apt to follow her own judgment, and that she was for the present absolutely

devoted to her cousin. "I think it will be broken off," she said. "That is my opinion. I don't think it can go on. But it is he that will do it; and for a time she will suffer greatly."

"Then I will wait," said Mr. Gilmore. "I will go home, and wait again. If there be a chance, I can live and hope."

"God grant that you may not hope in vain!"

"I would do my best to make her happy. I will leave you now, and am very thankful for your kindness. There would be no good in my seeing Mary?"

"I think not, Mr. Gilmore."

"I suppose not. She would only feel that I was teasing her. You will not tell her of my being here, I suppose?"

"It would do no good, I think."

"None in the least. I'll just go home and wait. If there should be anything to tell me——"

"If the match be broken off, I will take care that you shall hear it. I will write to Janet Fenwick. I know she is your friend."

Then Mr. Gilmore left the house, descended the hill without seeing Mary, packed up his things, and returned by the night train to Westbury. At seven o'clock in the morning he reached home in a Westbury gig, very cold, but upon the whole, a much more comfortable man than when he had left it. He had almost brought himself to think that even yet he would succeed at last.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FAREWELL

CHRISTMAS came, and a month beyond Christmas, and by the end of January Captain Marrable and Miss Lowther had agreed to regard all their autumn work as null and void,—to look back upon the love-making as a thing that had not been, and to part as friends. Both of them suffered much in this arrangement,—the man being the louder in the objurgations which he made against his ill-fortune, and in his assurances to himself and others that he was ruined for life. And, indeed, no man could have been much more unhappy than was Walter Marrable in these days. To him was added the trouble, which he did not endeavour to hide from himself or Mary, that all his misery came to him from his own father. Before the end of November, sundry renewed efforts were made to save a portion of the money, and the lawyers descended so low as to make an offer to take £2000. They might have saved themselves the humiliation, for neither £2000 nor £200 could have been made to be forthcoming. Walter Marrable, when the time came, was painfully anxious to fight somebody; but he was told very clearly by Messrs. Block and Curling, that there was nobody whom he could fight but his father, and that even by fighting his father, he would never obtain a penny. "My belief," said Mr. Curling, "is, that you could put your father in prison, but that probably is not your object."

Marrable was forced to own that that was not his object; but he did so in a tone which seemed to imply that a prison, were it even for life, would be the best place for his father. Block and Curling had been solicitors to the Marrables for ever so many years; and though they did not personally love the Colonel, they had a professional feeling that the blackness of a black sheep of a family should not be made public, at any rate by the family itself or by the family solicitors. Almost every family has a black sheep, and it is the especial duty of a family solicitor to keep the family black sheep from being dragged into the front and visible ranks of the family. The Captain had been fatally wrong in signing the paper which he had signed, and must take the consequences. "I don't think, Captain Marrable, that you would save yourself in any way by proceeding against the Colonel," said Mr. Curling. "I have not the slightest intention of proceeding against him," said the Captain, in great dudgeon,—and then he left the office and shook the dust off his feet, as against Block and Curling as well as against his father.

After this,—immediately after it,—he had one other interview with his father. As he told his uncle, the devil prompted him to go down to Portsmouth to see the man to whom his interests should have been dearer than to all the world beside, and who had robbed him so ruthlessly. There was nothing to be gained by such a visit. Neither money nor counsel, nor even consolation would be forthcoming from Colonel Marrable. Probably Walter Marrable felt in his anger that it would be unjust that his father should escape without a word to remind him from his son's mouth of all that he had done for his son. The Colonel held some staff office at Portsmouth, and his son came upon him in his

lodgings one evening as he was dressing to go out to dinner.

"Is that you, Walter?" said the battered old reprobate, appearing at the door of his bedroom; "I am very glad to see you."

"I don't believe it," said the son.

"Well;—what would you have me say? If you'll only behave decently, I shall be glad to see you."

"You've given me an example in that way, sir; have you not? Decency indeed!"

"Now, Walter, if you're going to talk about that horrid money, I tell you at once, that I won't listen to you."

"That's kind of you, sir."

"I've been unfortunate. As soon as I can repay it, or a part of it, I will. Since you've been back, I've done everything in my power to get a portion of it for you,—and should have got it, but for those stupid people in Bedford Row. After all, the money ought to have been mine, and that's what I suppose you felt when you enabled me to draw it."

"By heavens, that's cool!"

"I mean to be cool;—I'm always cool. The cab will be here to take me to dinner in a very few minutes. I hope you will not think I am running away from you?"

"I don't mean you to go till you've heard what I've got to say," said the Captain.

"Then, pray say it quickly." Upon this, the Colonel stood still and faced his son; not exactly with a look of anger, but assuming an appearance as though he were the person injured. He was a thin old man, who wore padded coats, and painted his beard and his eyebrows, and had false teeth, and who, in spite of chronic absence of means, always was possessed of clothes apparently just new from the hands of a West-end tailor.

He was one of those men who, through their long, useless, ill-flavoured lives, always contrive to live well, to eat and drink of the best, to lie softly, and to go about in purple and fine linen,—and yet, never have any money. Among a certain set Colonel Marrable, though well known, was still popular. He was good-tempered, well-mannered, sprightly in conversation, and had not a scruple in the world. He was over seventy, had lived hard, and must have known that there was not much more of it for him. But yet he had no qualms, and no fears. It may be doubted whether he knew that he was a bad man,—he, than whom you could find none worse though you were to search the country from one end to another. To lie, to steal,—not out of tills or pockets, because he knew the danger; to cheat—not at the card-table, because he had never come in the way of learning the lesson; to indulge every passion, though the cost to others might be ruin for life; to know no gods but his own bodily senses, and no duty but that which he owed to those gods; to eat all, and produce nothing; to love no one but himself; to have learned nothing but how to sit at table like a gentleman; to care not at all for his country, or even for his profession; to have no creed, no party, no friend, no conscience, to be troubled with nothing that touched his heart;—such had been, was, and was to be the life of Colonel Marrable. Perhaps it was accounted to him as a merit by some that he did not quail at any coming fate. When his doctor warned him that he must go soon, unless he would refrain from this and that and the other,—so wording his caution that the Colonel could not but know and did know, that let him refrain as he would he must go soon,—he resolved that he would refrain, thinking that the charms of his wretched life were sweet enough to

be worth such sacrifice; but in no other respect did the caution affect him. He never asked himself whether he had aught even to regret before he died, or to fear afterwards.

There are many Colonel Marrables about in the world, known well to be so at clubs, in drawing-rooms, and by the tradesmen who supply them. Men give them dinners and women smile upon them. The best of coats and boots are supplied to them. They never lack cigars nor champagne. They have horses to ride, and servants to wait upon them more obsequious than the servants of other people. And men will lend them money too,—well knowing that there is no chance of repayment. Now and then one hears a horrid tale of some young girl who surrenders herself to such a one, absolutely for love! Upon the whole the Colonel Marrables are popular. It is hard to follow such a man quite to the end and to ascertain whether or no he does go out softly at last, like the snuff of a candle,—just with a little stink.

“I will say it as quickly as I can,” said the Captain. “I can gain nothing I know by staying here in your company.”

“Not while you are so very uncivil.”

“Civil, indeed! I have to-day made up my mind, not for your sake, but for that of the family, that I will not prosecute you as a criminal for the gross robbery which you have perpetrated.”

“That is nonsense, Walter, and you know it as well as I do.”

“I am going back to India in a few weeks, and I trust I may never be called upon to see you again. I will not, if I can help it. It may be a toss-up which of us may die first, but this will be our last meeting.

I hope you may remember on your death-bed that you have utterly ruined your son in every relation of life. I was engaged to marry a girl,—whom I loved; but it is all over, because of you.”

“I had heard of that, Walter, and I really congratulate you on your escape.”

“I can't strike you——”

“No; don't do that.”

“Because of your age, and because you are my father. I suppose you have no heart, and that I cannot make you feel it.”

“My dear boy, I have an appetite, and I must go and satisfy it.” So saying the Colonel escaped, and the Captain allowed his father to make his way down the stairs and into the cab before he followed.

Though he had thus spoken to his father of his blasted hopes in regard to Mary Lowther, he had not as yet signified his consent to the measure by which their engagement was to be brought altogether to an end. The question had come to be discussed widely among their friends, as is the custom with such questions in such circumstances, and Mary had been told from all sides that she was bound to give it up,—that she was bound to give it up for her own sake, and more especially for his; that the engagement, if continued, would never lead to a marriage, and that it would in the meantime be absolutely ruinous to her,—and to him. Parson John came up and spoke to her with a strength for which she had not hitherto given Parson John credit. Her Aunt Sarah was very gentle with her, but never veered from her opinion that the engagement must of necessity be abandoned. Mr. Fenwick wrote to her a letter full of love and advice, and Mrs. Fenwick made a journey to Loring to dis-

cuss the matter with her. The discussion between them was very long.

"If you are saying this on my account," said Mary, "it is quite useless."

"On what other account? Mr. Gilmore? Indeed, indeed, I am not thinking of him. He is out of my mind altogether. I say it because I know it is impossible that you and your cousin should be married, and because such an engagement is destructive to both the parties."

"For myself," said Mary, "it can make no difference."

"It will make the greatest difference. It would wear you to pieces with a deferred hope. There is nothing so killing, so terrible, so much to be avoided. And then for him!— How is a man, thrown about on the world as he will be, to live in such a condition."

The upshot of it all was that Mary wrote a letter to her cousin proposing to surrender her engagement, and declaring that it would be best for them both that he should agree to accept her surrender. That plan which she had adopted before, of leaving all the responsibility to him, would not suffice. She had come to perceive during these weary discussions that if a way out of his bondage was to be given to Walter Marrable it must come from her action and not from his. She had intended to be generous when she left everything to him; but it was explained to her, both by her aunt and Mrs. Fenwick, that her generosity was of a kind which he could not use. It was for her to take the responsibility upon herself; it was for her to make the move; it was, in short, for her to say that the engagement should be over.

The very day that Mrs. Fenwick left her she wrote

the letter, and Captain Marrable had it in his pocket when he went down to bid a last farewell to his father. It had been a sad, weary, tear-laden performance,—the writing of that letter. She had resolved that no sign of a tear should be on the paper, and she had rubbed the moisture away from her eyes a dozen times during the work lest it should fall. There was but little of intended pathos in it; there were no expressions of love till she told him at the end that she would always love him dearly; there was no repining,—no mention of her own misery. She used all the arguments which others had used to her, and then drew her conclusion. She remembered that were she to tell him that she would still be true to him, she would in fact be asking for some such pledge back from him; and she said not a word of any such constancy on her own part. It was best for both of them that the engagement should be broken off; and, therefore, broken off it was, and should be now and for ever. That was the upshot of Mary Lowther's letter.

Captain Marrable when he received it, though he acknowledged the truth of all the arguments, loved the girl far too well to feel that this release gave him any comfort. He had doubtless felt that the engagement was a burden on him,—that he would not have entered into it had he not felt sure of his diminished fortune, and that there was a fearful probability that it might never result in their being married; but not the less did the breaking up of it make him very wretched. An engagement for marriage can never be so much to a man as it is to a woman,—marriage itself can never be so much, can never be so great a change, produce such utter misery, or of itself be efficient for such perfect happiness,—but his love was true and steadfast,

and when he learned that she was not to be his, he was as a man who had been robbed of his treasure. Her letter was long and argumentative. His reply was short and passionate;—and the reader shall see it.

“ Duke Street, January, 186—.

“ DEAREST MARY,

“ I suppose you are right. Everybody tells me so, and no doubt everybody tells you the same. The chances are that I shall get bowled over; and as for getting back again, I don't know when I can hope for it. In such a condition it would I believe be very wrong and selfish were I to go and leave you to think of me as your future husband. You would be waiting for that which would never come.

“ As for me, I shall never care for any other woman. A soldier can get on very well without a wife, and I shall always regard myself now as one of those useless but common animals who are called ‘not marrying men.’ I shall never marry. I shall always carry your picture in my heart, and shall not think that I am sinning against you or any one else when I do so after hearing that you are married.

“ I need not tell you that I am very wretched. It is not only that I am separated from you, my own dear, dearest girl, but that I cannot refrain from thinking how it has come to pass that it is so. I went down to see my father yesterday. I did see him, and you may imagine of what nature was the interview. I sometimes think, when I lie in bed, that no man was ever so ill-treated as I have been.

“ Dearest love, good-bye. I could not have brought myself to say what you have said, but I know that you are right. It has not been my fault, dear. I did love

you, and do love you as truly as any man ever loved a woman.

“Yours with all my heart,

“WALTER MARRABLE.”

“I should like to see you once more before I start. Is there any harm in this? I must run down to my uncle's, but I will not go up to you if you think it better not. If you can bring yourself to see me, pray, pray do.”

In answer to this Mary wrote to him to say that she would certainly see him when he came. She knew no reason, she said, why they should not meet. When she had written her note she asked her aunt's opinion. Aunt Sarah would not take upon herself to say that no such meeting ought to take place, but it was very evident that she thought that it would be dangerous.

Captain Marrable did come down to Loring about the end of January, and the meeting did take place. Mary had stipulated that she should be alone when he called. He had suggested that they should walk out together, as had been their wont; but this she had declined, telling him that the sadness of such a walk would be too much for her, and saying to her aunt with a smile that were she once again out with him on the towing-path, there would be no chance of their ever coming home. “I could not ask him to turn back,” she said, “when I should know that it would be for the last time.” It was arranged, therefore, that the meeting should take place in the drawing-room at Uphill Lane.

He came into the room with a quick, uneasy step, and when he reached her he put his arm around her

and kissed her. She had formed certain little resolutions on this subject. He should kiss her, if he pleased, once again when he went,—and only once. And now, almost without a motion on her part that was perceptible, she took herself out of his arms. There should be no word about that if she could help it,—but she was bound to remember that he was nothing to her now but a distant cousin. He must cease to be her lover, though she loved him. Nay,—he had so ceased already. There must be no more laying of her head upon his shoulder, no more twisting of her fingers through his locks, no more looking into his eyes, no more amorous pressing of her lips against his own. Much as she loved him she must remember now that such outward signs of love as these would not befit her. “Walter,” she said, “I am so glad to see you! And yet I do not know but what it would have been better that you should have stayed away.”

“Why should it have been better? It would have been unnatural not to have met each other.”

“So I thought. Why should not friends endure to say good-bye, even though their friendship be as dear as ours? I told Aunt Sarah that I should be angry with myself afterwards if I feared to tell you to come.”

“There is nothing to fear,—only that it is so wretched an ending,” said he.

“In one way I will not look on it as an ending. You and I cannot be married, Walter; but I shall always have your career to look to, and shall think of you as my dearest friend. I shall expect you to write to me;—not at first, but after a year or so. You will be able to write to me then as though you were my brother.”

“I shall never be able to do that.”

“Oh, yes;—that is, if you will make the effort for

my sake. I do not believe but what people can manage and mould their own wills if they will struggle hard enough. You must not be unhappy, Walter."

"I am not so wise or self-confident as you, Mary. I shall be unhappy. I should be deceiving myself if I were to tell myself otherwise. There is nothing before me to make me happy. When I came home there was very little that I cared for, though I had the prospect of this money and thought that my cares in that respect were over. Then I met you, and the whole world seemed altered. I was happy even when I found how badly I had been treated. Now all that has gone, and I cannot think that I shall be happy again."

"I mean to be happy, Walter."

"I hope you may, dear."

"There are gradations in happiness. The highest I ever came to yet was when you told me that you loved me." When she said that, he attempted to take her hand, but she withdrew from him, almost without a sign that she was doing so. "I have not quite lost that yet," she continued, "and I do not mean to lose it altogether. I shall always remember that you loved me; and you will not forget that I too loved you."

"Forget it?—no, I don't exactly think that I shall forget it."

"I don't know why it should make us altogether unhappy. For a time, I suppose, we shall be down-hearted."

"I shall, I know. I can't pretend to such strength as to say that I can lose what I want, and not feel it."

"We shall both feel it, Walter;—but I do not know that we must be miserable. When do you leave England?"

"Nothing is settled. I have not had the heart to

think of it. It will not be for a month or two yet. I suppose I shall stay out my regular Indian time."

"And what shall you do with yourself?"

"I have no plans at all, Mary. Sir Gregory has asked me to Dunripple, and I shall remain there probably till I am tired of it. It will be so pleasant, talking to my uncle of my father."

"Do not talk of him at all, Walter. You will best forgive him by not talking of him. We shall hear, I suppose, of what you do from Parson John."

She had seated herself a little away from him, and he did not attempt to draw near to her again till at her bidding he rose to leave her. He sat there for nearly an hour, and during that time much more was said by her than by him. She endeavoured to make him understand that he was as free as air, and that she would hope some day to hear that he was married. In reply to this, he asserted very loudly that he would never call any woman his wife, unless unexpected circumstances should enable him to return and again ask for her hand. "Not that you are to wait for me, Mary," he said. She smiled, but made no definite answer to this. She had told herself that it would not be for his welfare that she should allude to the possibility of a renewed engagement, and she did not allude to it.

"God bless you, Walter," she said at last, coming to him and offering him her hand.

"God bless you for ever and ever, dearest Mary," he said, taking her in his arms and kissing her again and again. It was to be the last, and she did not seem to shun him. Then he left her, went as far as the door,—returned again. "Dearest, dearest Mary: You will give me one more kiss?"

"It shall be the last, Walter," she said. Then she did kiss him, as she would have kissed her brother that was going from her, and escaping from his arms she left the room.

He had come to Loring late on the previous evening, and on that same day he returned to London. No doubt he dined at his club, drank a pint of wine and smoked a cigar or two, though he did it all after a lugubrious fashion. Men knew that he had fallen into great trouble in the matter of his inheritance, and did not expect him to be joyful and of pleasant countenance. "By George!" said little Captain Boodle, "if it was my governor, I'd go very near being hung for him; I would, by George!" Which remark obtained a good deal of general sympathy in the billiard-room of that military club. In the meantime Mary Lowther at Loring had resolved that she would not be lugubrious, and she sat down to dinner opposite to her aunt with a pleasant smile on her face. Before the evening was over, however, she had in some degree broken down. "I fear I can't get along with novels, Aunt Sarah," she said. "Don't you think I could find something to do." Then the old lady came round the room and kissed her niece;—but she made no other reply.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BULLHAMPTON NEWS

WHEN the matter was quite settled at Loring,—when Miss Marrable not only knew that the engagement had been surrendered on both sides, but that it had been so surrendered as to be incapable of being again patched up, she bethought herself of her promise to Mr. Gilmore. This did not take place for a fortnight after the farewell which was spoken in the last chapter,—at which time Walter Marrable was staying with his uncle, Sir Gregory, at Dunripple. Miss Marrable had undertaken that Mr. Gilmore should be informed as soon as the engagement was brought to an end, and had been told that this information should reach him through Mrs. Fenwick. When a fortnight had passed, Miss Marrable was aware that Mary had not herself written to her friend at Bullhampton; and though she felt herself to be shy of the subject, though she entertained a repugnance to make any communication based on a hope that Mary might after a while receive her old lover graciously,—for time must of course be needed before such grace could be accorded,—she did write a few lines to Mrs. Fenwick. She explained that Captain Marrable was to return to India, and that he was to go as a free man. Mary, she said, bore her burden well. Of course, it must be some time before the remembrance of her cousin would cease to be a burden to her; but she went about her heavy

task with a good will,—so said Miss Marrable,—and would no doubt conquer her own unhappiness after a time by the strength of her personal character. Not a word was spoken of Mr. Gilmore, but Mrs. Fenwick understood it all. The letter, she knew well, was a message to Mr. Gilmore;—a message which it would be her duty to give as soon as possible, that he might extract from it such comfort as it would contain for him,—though it would be his duty not to act upon it for, at any rate, many months to come. “And it will be a comfort to him,” said her husband when he read Miss Marrable’s letter.

“Of all the men I know, he is the most constant,” said Mrs. Fenwick, “and best deserves that his constancy should be rewarded.”

“It is the man’s nature,” said the parson. “Of course, he will get her at last; and when he has got her, he will be quite contented with the manner in which he has won her. There’s nothing like going on with a thing. I believe I might be a bishop if I set my heart on it.”

“Why don’t you then?”

“I am not sure that the beauty of the thing is so well-defined to me as is Mary Lowther’s to poor Harry. In perseverance and success of that kind the man’s mind should admit of no doubt. Harry is quite clear of this,—that in spite of Mary’s preference for her cousin, it would be the grandest thing in the world to him that she should marry him. The certainty of his condition will pull him through at last.”

Two days after this Mrs. Fenwick put Miss Marrable’s letter into Mr. Gilmore’s hand,—having perceived that it was specially written that it might be so treated. She kept it in her pocket till she should

chance to see him, and at last handed it to him as she met him walking on his own grounds. "I have a letter from Loring," she said.

"From Mary?"

"No;—from Mary's aunt. I have it here, and I think you had better read it. To tell you the truth, Harry, I have been looking for you ever since I got it. Only you must not make too much of it."

Then he read the letter. "What do you mean," he asked, "by making too much of it?"

"You must not suppose that Mary is the same as before she saw this cousin of hers."

"But she is the same."

"Well;—yes, in body and soul, no doubt. But such an experience leaves a mark which cannot be rubbed out quite at once."

"You mean that I must wait before I ask her again."

"Of course you must wait. The mark must be rubbed out first, you know."

"I will wait; but as for the rubbing out of the mark, I take it that it will be altogether beyond me. Do you think, Mrs. Fenwick, that no woman should ever, under any circumstances, marry one man when she loves another?"

She could not bring herself to tell to him that in her opinion Mary Lowther would of all women be the least likely to do so. "That is one of those questions," she said, "which it is almost impossible for a person to answer. In the first place, before answering it, we should have a clear definition of love."

"You know what I mean well enough."

"I do know what you mean, but I hardly do know how to answer you. If you went to Mary Lowther

now, she would take it almost as an insult; and she would feel it in that light, because she is aware that you know of this story of her cousin."

"Of course I shall not go to her at once."

"She will never forget him altogether."

"Such things cannot be forgotten," said Gilmore.

"Nevertheless," said Mrs. Fenwick, "it is probable that Mary will be married some day. These wounds get themselves cured as do others."

"I shall never be cured of mine," said he, laughing.

"As for Mary, I hardly know what to think. I suppose girls do marry without caring very much for the men they take. One sees it every day; and then afterwards, they love their husbands. It isn't very romantic, but it seems to me that it is so."

"Don't think of it too much, Harry," said Mrs. Fenwick. "If you still are devoted to her——"

"Indeed I am."

"Then wait awhile, and we will have her at Bullhampton again. You know at any rate what our wishes are."

Everything had been very quiet at Bullhampton during the last three months. The mill was again in regular work, and Sam had remained at home with fair average regularity. The Vicar had heard nothing more of Carry Brattle, and had been unable to trace her or to learn where she was living. He had taken various occasions to mention her name to her mother, but Mrs. Brattle knew nothing of her, and believed that Sam was equally ignorant with herself. Both she and the Vicar found it impossible to speak to Sam on the subject, though they knew that he had been with his sister more than once when she was living at Pycroft Common. As for the miller himself, no one had men-

tioned Carry's name to him since the day on which the Vicar had made his attempt. And from that day to the present there had been, if not ill blood, at least cold blood between Mr. Fenwick and old Brattle. The Vicar had gone down to the mill as often as usual, having determined that what had occurred should make no difference with him; and the intercourse with Mrs. Brattle and Fanny had been as kind on each side as usual;—but the miller had kept out of his way, retreating from him openly, going from the house to the mill as soon as he appeared, never speaking to him, and taking no other notice of him beyond a slight touch of the hat. "Your husband is still angry with me," he said one day to Mrs. Brattle. She shook her head and smiled sadly, and said that it would pass over some day,—only that Jacob was so persistent. With Sam, the Vicar held little or no communication. Sam in these days never went to church, and though he worked at the mill pretty constantly, he would absent himself from the village occasionally for a day or two together, and tell no one where he had been.

The strangest and most important piece of business going on at this time in Bullhampton was the building of a new chapel or tabernacle,—the people called it a Salem,—for Mr. Puddleham. The first word as to the erection reached Mr. Fenwick's ears from Grimes, the builder and carpenter, who, meeting him in Bullhampton Street, pointed out to him a bit of spare ground just opposite the vicarage gates,—a morsel of a green on which no building had ever yet stood, and told him that the Marquis had given it for a chapel. "Indeed," said Fenwick. "I hope it may be convenient and large enough for them. All the same, I wish it had been a

little farther from my gate." This he said in a cheery tone, showing thereby considerable presence of mind. That such a building should be so placed was a trial to him, and he knew at once that the spot must have been selected to annoy him. Doubtless, the land in question was the property of the Marquis of Trowbridge. When he came to think of it, he had no doubt on the matter. Nevertheless, the small semi-circular piece of grass immediately opposite to his own swinging gate, looked to all the world as though it were an appendage of the Vicarage. A cottage built there would have been offensive; but a staring brick Methodist chapel, with the word Salem inserted in large letters over the door, would, as he was aware, flout him every time he left or entered his garden. He had always been specially careful to avoid any semblance of a quarrel with the Methodist minister, and had in every way shown his willingness to regard Mr. Puddleham's flock as being equal to his own in the general gifts of civilisation.

To Mr. Puddleham himself, he had been very civil, sending him fruit and vegetables out of the Vicarage garden, and lending him newspapers. When the little Puddlehams were born, Mrs. Fenwick always inquired after the mother and infant. The greatest possible care had been exercised at the Vicarage since Mr. Fenwick's coming to show that the Established Church did not despise the dissenting congregation. For the last three years there had been talk of a new chapel, and Mr. Fenwick had himself discussed the site with Mr. Puddleham. A large and commodious spot of ground, remote from the vicarage, had, as he believed, been chosen. When he heard those tidings, and saw what would be the effect of the building, it

seemed to him almost impossible that a Marquis could condescend to such revenge. He went at once to Mr. Puddleham, and learned from him that Grimes's story was true. This had been in December. After Christmas, the foundations were to be begun at once, said Mr. Puddleham, so that the brickwork might go on as soon as the frosts were over. Mr. Puddleham was in high spirits, and expressed a hope that he should be in his new chapel by next August. When the Vicar asked why the change of site was made, being careful to show no chagrin by the tone of his voice, Mr. Puddleham remarked that the Marquis's agent thought that it would be an improvement, "in which opinion I quite coincide," said Mr. Puddleham, looking very stern,—showing his teeth, as it were, and displaying an inclination for a parish quarrel. Fenwick, still prudent, made no objection to the change, and dropped no word of displeasure in Mr. Puddleham's hearing.

"I don't believe he can do it," said Mrs. Fenwick, boiling with passion.

"He can, no doubt," said the Vicar.

"Do you mean to say the street is his;—to do what he likes with it?"

"The street is the Queen's highway,—which means that it belongs to the public; but this is not the street. I take it that all the land in the village belongs to the Marquis. I never knew of any common right, and I don't believe there is any."

"It is the meanest thing I ever heard of in my life," said Mrs. Fenwick.

"There I agree with you." Later in the day, when he had been thinking of it for hours, he again spoke to his wife. "I shall write to the Marquis and remonstrate. It will probably be of no avail; but I think

I ought to do so for the sake of those who come after me. I shall be able to bother him a good deal, if I can do nothing else," he added, laughing. "I feel, too, that I must quarrel with somebody, and I won't quarrel with dear old Puddleham, if I can help it."

CHAPTER XXXV

MR. PUDDLEHAM'S NEW CHAPEL

THE Vicar devoted a week to the consideration of his grievance about the chapel, and then did write to the Marquis. Indeed, there was no time to be lost if he intended to do anything, as on the second day after his interview with Mr. Grimes, Grimes himself, with two men to assist him, began their measuring on the devoted spot, sticking in little marks for the corners of the projected building, and turning up a sod here and there. Mr. Grimes was a staunch Churchman; and though in the way of business he was very glad to have the building of a Methodist chapel,—or of a Pagan temple, if such might come in his way,—yet, even though he possibly might give some offence to the great man's shadow in Bullhampton, he was willing to postpone his work for two or three days at the Vicar's request. "Grimes," the Vicar said, "I'm not quite sure that I like this."

"Well, sir,—no, sir. I was thinking myself, sir, that maybe you might take it unkind in the Marquis."

"I think I shall write to him. Perhaps you wouldn't mind giving over for a day or two." Grimes yielded at once, and took his spade and measurements away, although Mr. Puddleham fretted a good deal. Mr. Puddleham had been much elated by the prospect of his new Bethel, and had, it must be confessed, received into his mind an idea that it would be a good thing

to quarrel with the Vicar under the auspices of the landlord. Fenwick's character had hitherto been too strong for him, and he had been forced into parochial quiescence and religious amity almost in spite of his conscience. He was a much older man than Mr. Fenwick, having been for thirty years in the ministry, and he had always previously enjoyed the privilege of being on bad terms with the clergyman of the Establishment. It had been his glory to be a poacher on another man's manor, to filch souls, as it were, out of the keeping of a pastor of a higher grade than himself, to say severe things of the shortcomings of an endowed clergyman, and to obtain recognition of his position by the activity of his operations in the guise of a blister. Our Vicar, understanding something of this, had, with some malice towards the gentleman himself, determined to rob Mr. Puddleham of his blistering powers. There is no doubt a certain pleasure in poaching which does not belong to the licit following of game; but a man can't poach if the right of shooting be accorded to him. Mr. Puddleham had not been quite happy in his mind amidst the ease and amiable relations which Mr. Fenwick enforced upon him, and had long since begun to feel that a few cabbages and peaches did not repay him for the loss of those pleasant and bitter things, which it would have been his to say in his daily walks and from the pulpit of his Salem, had he not been thus hampered, confined, and dominated. Hitherto he had hardly gained a single soul from under Mr. Fenwick's grasp,—had indeed on the balance lost his grasp on souls, and was beginning to be aware that this was so because of the cabbages and the peaches. He told himself that though he had not hankered after these flesh-pots, that though he would have preferred to be

without the flesh-pots, he had submitted to them. He was painfully conscious of the guile of this young man, who had, as it were, cheated him out of that appropriate acerbity of religion, without which a proselyting sect can hardly maintain its ground beneath the shadow of an endowed and domineering Church. War was necessary to Mr. Puddleham. He had come to be hardly anybody at all, because he was at peace with the vicar of the parish in which he was established. His eyes had been becoming gradually open to all this for years; and when he had been present at the bitter quarrel between the Vicar and the Marquis, he had at once told himself that now was the opportunity. He had intended to express a clear opinion to Mr. Fenwick that he, Mr. Fenwick, had been very wrong in speaking to the Marquis as he had spoken, and as he was walking out of the farm-house he was preparing some words as to the respect due to those in authority. It happened, however, that at that moment the wind was taken out of his sails by a strange comparison which the Vicar made to him between the sins of them two, ministers of God as they were, and the sins of Carry Brattle. Mr. Puddleham at the moment had been cowed and quelled. He was not quite able to carry himself in the Vicar's presence as though he were the Vicar's equal. But the desire for a quarrel remained, and when it was suggested to him by Mr. Packer, the Marquis's man of business, that the green opposite to the Vicarage gate would be a convenient site for his chapel, and that the Marquis was ready to double his before-proffered subscription, then he saw plainly that the moment had come, and that it was fitting that he should gird up his loins and return all future cabbages to the proud donor.

Mr. Puddleham had his eye keenly set on the scene of his future ministration, and was aware of Grimes's default almost as soon as that man with his myrmidons had left the ground. He at once went to Grimes with heavy denunciations, with threats of the Marquis, and with urgent explanation as to the necessity of instant work.

But Grimes was obdurate. The Vicar had asked him to leave the work for a day or two, and of course he must do what the Vicar asked. If he couldn't be allowed to do as much as that for the Vicar of the parish, Bullhampton wouldn't be, in Mr. Grimes' opinion, any place for anybody to live in. Mr. Puddleham argued the matter out, but he argued in vain. Mr. Grimes declared that there was time enough, and that he would have the work finished by the time fixed,—unless, indeed, the Marquis should change his mind. Mr. Puddleham regarded this as a most improbable supposition. "The Marquis doesn't change his mind, Mr. Grimes," he said; and then he walked forth from Mr. Grimes's house with much offence.

By this time all Bullhampton knew of the quarrel,—knew of it, although Mr. Fenwick had been so very careful to guard himself from any quarrelling at all. He had not spoken a word in anger on the subject to anyone but his wife; and in making his request to Grimes had done so with hypocritical good humour. But, nevertheless, he was aware that the parish was becoming hot about it; and when he sat down to write his letter to the Marquis he was almost minded to give up the idea of writing, to return to Grimes, and to allow the measuring and sod-turning to be continued. Why should a place of worship opposite to his gate be considered by him as an injury? Why should the

psalm-singing of Christian brethren hurt his ears as he walked about his garden? And if, through the infirmity of his nature, his eyes and his ears were hurt, what was that to the great purport for which he had been sent into the parish? Was he not about to create enmity by his opposition; and was it not his special duty to foster love and goodwill among his people? After all he, within his own Vicarage grounds, had all that it was intended that he should possess; and that he held very firmly. Poor Mr. Puddleham had no such firm holding; and why should he quarrel with Mr. Puddleham because that ill-paid preacher sought to strengthen the ground on which his Salem stood?

As he paused, however, to think of all this, there came upon him the conviction that in this thing that was to be done the Marquis was determined to punish him personally, and he could not resist the temptation of fighting the Marquis. And then, if he succumbed easily in this matter, would it not follow almost as a matter of course that the battle against him would be carried on elsewhere? If he yielded now, resolving to ignore altogether any idea of his own comfort or his own taste, would he thereby maintain that tranquillity in his parish which he thought so desirable? He had already seen that in Mr. Puddleham's manner to himself which made him sure that Mr. Puddleham was ambitious to be a sword in the right hand of the Marquis. Personally the Vicar was himself pugnacious. Few men, perhaps, were more so. If there must be a fight let them come on, and he would do his best. Turning the matter thus backwards and forwards in his mind, he came at last to the conclusion that there must be a fight, and consequently he wrote the following letter to the Marquis:—

“ Bullhampton Vicarage, January 3, 186—.

“ MY LORD MARQUIS,

“ I learned by chance the other day in the village that a new chapel for the use of the Methodist congregation of the parish was to be built on the little open green immediately opposite the Vicarage gate, and that this special spot of ground had been selected and given by your lordship for this purpose. I do not at all know what truth there may be in this,—except that Mr. Grimes, the carpenter here, has received orders from your agent about the work. It may probably be the case that the site has been chosen by Mr. Packer, and not by your lordship. As no real delay to the building can at this time of the year arise from a short postponement of the beginning, I have asked Mr. Grimes to desist till I shall have written to you on the subject.

“ I can assure your lordship, in the first place, that no clergyman of the Established Church in the kingdom can be less unwilling than I am that they who dissent from my teaching in the parish should have a commodious place of worship. If land belonged to me in the place I would give it myself for such a purpose; and were there no other available site than that chosen, I would not for a moment remonstrate against it. I had heard, with satisfaction, from Mr. Puddleham himself that another spot was chosen near the cross roads in the village, on which there is more space, to which as I believe there is no objection, and which would certainly be nearer than that now selected to the majority of the congregation.

“ But of course it would not be for me to trouble your lordship as to the ground on which a Methodist chapel should be built, unless I had reason to show

why the site now chosen is objectionable. I do not for a moment question your lordship's right to give the site. There is something less than a quarter of an acre in the patch in question; and though hitherto I have always regarded it as belonging in some sort to the Vicarage,—as being a part, as it were, of the entrance,—I feel convinced that you, as landlord of the ground, would not entertain the idea of bestowing it for any purpose without being sure of your right to do so. I raise no question on this point, believing there is none to be raised; but I respectfully submit to your lordship, whether such an erection as that contemplated by you will not be a lasting injury to the Vicarage of Bullhampton, and whether you would wish to inflict a lasting and gratuitous injury on the vicar of a parish, the greatest portion of which belongs to yourself.

“No doubt life will be very possible to me and my wife, and to succeeding vicars and their wives, with a red-brick chapel built as a kind of watch-tower over the Vicarage gate. So would life be possible at Turn-over Park with a similar edifice immediately before your lordship's hall-door. Knowing very well that the reasonable wants of the Methodists cannot make such a building on such a spot necessary, you no doubt would not consent to it; and I now venture to ask you to put a stop to this building here for the same reason. Were there no other site in the parish equally commodious I would not say a word.

“I have the honour to be,

“Your lordship's most obedient servant,

“FRANCIS FENWICK.”

Lord Trowbridge, when he received this letter,—when he had only partially read it, and had not at all

digested it, was disposed to yield the point. He was a silly man, thinking much too highly of his own position, believing himself entitled to unlimited deference from all those who in any way came within the rays of his magnificence, and easily made angry by opposition; but he was not naturally prone to inflict evil, and did in some degree recognise it as a duty attached to his splendour that he should be beneficent to the inferiors with whom he was connected. Great as was his wrath against the present Vicar of Bullhampton, and thoroughly as he conceived it to be expedient that so evil-minded a pastor should be driven out of the parish, nevertheless he felt some scruple at taking a step which would be injurious to the parish vicar, let the parish vicar be who he might. Packer was the sinner who had originated the new plan for punishing Mr. Fenwick,—Packer, with the assistance of Mr. Puddleham; and the Marquis, though he had in some sort authorised the plan, had in truth thought very little about it. When the Vicar spoke of the lasting injury to the Vicarage, and when Lord Trowbridge remembered that he owned two thousand and two acres within the parish,—as Mr. Puddleham had told him,—he began to think that the chapel had better be built elsewhere. The Vicar was a pestilent man to whom punishment was due, but the punishment should be made to attach itself to the man, rather than to the man's office. So was working the Marquis's mind, till the Marquis came upon that horrid passage in the Vicar's letter, in which it was suggested that the building of a Methodist chapel in his own park, immediately in front of his own august hall-door might under certain circumstances be expedient. The remark was almost as pernicious and unpardonable as that which had been made about his

lordship's daughters. It was manifest to him that the Vicar intended to declare that marquises were no more than other people,—and that the declaration was made and insisted on with the determination of insulting him. Had this apostate priest been capable of feeling any proper appreciation of his own position and that of the Marquis, he would have said nothing of Turn-over Park. When the Marquis had read the letter a second time and had digested it he perceived that its whole tenor was bad, that the writer was evil-minded, and that no request made by him should be granted. Even though the obnoxious chapel should have to be pulled down for the benefit of another Vicar, it should be put up for the punishment of this Vicar. A man who wants to have a favour done for him, can hardly hope to be successful if he asks for the favour with insolence. So the heart of the Marquis was hardened, and he was strengthened to do that which misbecame him both as a gentleman and a landlord.

He did not answer the letter for some time; but he saw Packer, saw his head agent, and got out the map of the property. The map of the property was not very clear in the matter, but he remembered the space well, and convinced himself that no other place in all Bullhampton could be so appropriate for a Methodist chapel. At the end of a week he caused a reply to be written to Mr. Fenwick. He would not demean himself by writing with his own hand, but he gave his orders to the head agent. The head agent merely informed the Vicar that it was considered that the spot of ground in question was the most appropriate in the village for the purpose in hand.

Mrs. Fenwick when she heard the reply burst out into tears. She was a woman by no means over devoted

to things of this world, who thought much of her duties and did them, who would have sacrificed anything for her husband and children, who had learned the fact that both little troubles and great, if borne with patience, may be borne with ease; but she did think much of her house, was proud of her garden, and rejoiced in the external prettiness of her surroundings. It was gall to her that this hideous building should be so placed as to destroy the comeliness of that side of her abode. "We shall hear their singing and ranting whenever we open our front windows," she said.

"Then we won't open them," said the Vicar.

"We can't help ourselves. Just see what it will be whenever we go in and out. We might just as well have it inside the house at once."

"You speak as though Mr. Puddleham were always in his pulpit."

"They're always doing something,—and then the building will be there whether it's open or shut. It will alter the parish altogether, and I really think it will be better that you should get an exchange."

"And run away from my enemy?"

"It would be running away from an intolerable nuisance."

"I won't do that," said the Vicar. "If there were no other reason for staying, I won't put it in the power of the Marquis of Trowbridge to say that he has turned me out of my parish, and so punished me because I have not submitted myself to him. I have not sought the quarrel. He has been overbearing and insolent, and now is meanly desirous to injure me because I will not suffer his insolence. No doubt, placed as he is, he can do much; but he cannot turn me out of Bullhampton."

"What is the good of staying, Frank, if we are to be made wretched?"

"We won't be made wretched. What! be wretched because there is an ugly building opposite to your outside gate? It is almost wicked to say so. I don't like it. I like the doing of the thing less even than the thing itself. If it can be stopped, I will stop it. If it could be prevented by any amount of fighting, I should think myself right to fight in such a cause. If I can see my way to doing anything to oppose the Marquis, it shall be done. But I won't run away." Mrs. Fenwick said nothing more on the subject at that moment, but she felt that the glory and joy of the Vicarage were gone from it.

CHAPTER XXXVI

SAM BRATTLE GOES OFF AGAIN

MR. GRIMES had suggested to the Vicar in a very low whisper that the new chapel might perhaps be put down as a nuisance. "It ain't for me to say, of course," said Mr. Grimes, "and in the way of business one building is as good as another as long as you see your money. But buildings is stopped because they're nuisances." This occurred a day or two after the receipt of the agent's letter from Turnover, and the communication was occasioned by orders given to Mr. Grimes to go on with the building instantly, unless he intended to withdraw from the job. "I don't think, Grimes, that I can call a place of Christian worship a nuisance," said the Vicar. To this Grimes rejoined that he had known a nunnery bell to be stopped because it was a nuisance, and that he didn't see why a Methodist chapel bell was not as bad as a nunnery bell. Fenwick had declared that he would fight if he could find a leg to stand upon, and he thanked Grimes, saying that he would think of the suggestion. But when he thought of it, he did not see that any remedy was open to him on that side. In the meantime Mr. Puddleham attacked Grimes with great severity because the work was not continued. Mr. Puddleham, feeling that he had the Marquis at his back, was eager for the fight. He had already received in the street a salutation from the Vicar, cordial as usual, with the very slightest bend of his neck, and the sourest expression

of his mouth. Mrs. Puddleham had already taught the little Puddlehams that the Vicarage cabbages were bitter with the wormwood of an endowed Establishment, and ought no longer to be eaten by the free children of an open Church. Mr. Puddleham had already raised up his voice in his existing tabernacle, as to the injury which was being done to his flock, and had been very touching on the subject of the little vineyard which the wicked king coveted. When he described himself as Naboth, it could not but be supposed that Ahab and Jezebel were both in Bullhampton. It went forth through the village that Mr. Puddleham had described Mrs. Fenwick as Jezebel, and the torch of discord had been thrown down, and war was raging through the parish.

There had come to be very high words indeed between Mr. Grimes and Mr. Puddleham, and some went so far as to declare that they had heard the builder threaten to punch the minister's head. This Mr. Grimes denied stoutly, as the Methodist party were making much of it in consequence of Mr. Puddleham's cloth and advanced years. "There's no lies is too hot for them," said Mr. Grimes, in his energy, "and no lawlessness too heavy." Then he absolutely refused to put his hand to a spade or a trowel. He had his time named in his contract, he said, and nobody had a right to drive him. This was ended by the appearance on a certain Monday morning of a Baptist builder from Salisbury, with all the appurtenances of his trade, and with a declaration on Mr. Grimes's part, that he would have the law on the two leading members of the Puddleham congregation, from whom he had received his original order. In truth, however, there had been no contract, and Mr. Grimes had gone to work upon a

verbal order which, according to the Puddleham theory, he had already vitiated by refusing compliance with its terms. He, however, was hot upon his lawsuit, and thus the whole parish was by the ears.

It may be easily understood how much Mr. Fenwick would suffer from all this. It had been specially his pride that his parish had been at peace, and he had plumed himself on the way in which he had continued to clip the claws with which nature had provided the Methodist minister. Though he was fond of a fight himself, he had taught himself to know that in no way could he do the business of his life more highly or more usefully than as a peacemaker; and as a peacemaker he had done it. He had never put his hand within Mr. Puddleham's arm, and whispered a little parochial nothing into his neighbour's ear, without taking some credit to himself for his cleverness. He had called his peaches angels of peace, and had spoken of his cabbages as being dove-winged. All this was now over, and there was hardly one in Bullhampton who was not busy hating and abusing somebody else.

And then there came another trouble on the Vicar. Just at the end of January, Sam Brattle came up to the Vicarage and told Mr. Fenwick that he was going to leave the mill. Sam was dressed very decently; but he was attired in an un-Bullhampton fashion, which was not pleasant to Mr. Fenwick's eyes; and there was about him an air which seemed to tell of filial disobedience and personal independence.

"But you mean to come back again, Sam?" said the Vicar.

"Well, sir; I don't know as I do. Father and I has had words."

"And that is to be a reason why you should leave him? You speak of your father as though he were no more to you than another man."

"I wouldn't a' borne not a tenth of it from no other man, Mr. Fenwick."

"Well—and what of that? Is there any measure of what is due by you to your father? Remember, Sam, I know your father well."

"You do, sir."

"He is a very just man, and he is very fond of you. You are the apple of his eye, and now you would bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"You ask mother, sir, and she'll tell you how it is. I just said a word to him,—a word as was right to be said, and he turned upon me, and bade me go away and come back no more."

"Do you mean that he has banished you from the mill?"

"He said what I tells you. He told mother afterwards, that if so as I would promise never to mention that thing again, I might come and go as I pleased. But I wasn't going to make no such promise. I up and told him so; and then he—cursed me."

For a moment or two the Vicar was silent, thinking whether in this affair Sam had been most wrong, or the old man. Of course he was hearing but one side of the question. "What was it, Sam, that he forbade you to mention?"

"It don't matter now, sir; only I thought I'd better come and tell you, along of your being the bail, sir."

"Do you mean that you are going to leave Bullhampton altogether?"

"To leave it altogether, Mr. Fenwick. I ain't doing no good here."

"And why shouldn't you do good? Where can you do more good?"

"It can't be good to be having words with father day after day."

"But, Sam, I don't think you can go away. You are bound by the magistrates' orders. I don't speak for myself, but I fear the police would be after you."

"And is it to go on allays,—that a chap can't move to better hisself, because them fellows can't catch the men as murdered old Trumbull? That can't be law,—nor yet justice." Upon this there arose a discussion in which the Vicar endeavoured to explain to the young man that as he had evidently consorted with the men who were, on the strongest possible grounds, suspected to be the murderers, and as he had certainly been with those men where he had no business to be,—namely, in Mr. Fenwick's own garden at night,—he had no just cause of complaint at finding his own liberty more crippled than that of other people. No doubt Sam understood this well enough, as he was sharp and intelligent; but he fought his own battle, declaring that as the Vicar had not prosecuted him for being in the garden, nobody could be entitled to punish him for that offence; and that as it had been admitted that there was no evidence connecting him with the murder, no policeman could have a right to confine him to one parish. He argued the matter so well, that Mr. Fenwick was left without much to say. He was unwilling to press his own responsibility in the matter of the bail, and therefore allowed the question to fall through,—tacitly admitting that if Sam chose to leave the parish, there was nothing in the affair of the murder to hinder him. He went back, therefore, to the inexpediency of the young man's departure, telling

him that he would rush right into the Devil's jaws. "Maybe so, Mr. Fenwick," said Sam, "but I'm sure I'll never be out of 'em as long as I stays here in Bullhampton."

"But what is it all about, Sam?" The Vicar, as he asked the question had a very distinct idea in his own head as to the cause of the quarrel, and was aware that his sympathies were with the son rather than with the father. Sam answered never a word, and the Vicar repeated his question. "You have quarrelled with your father before this, and have made it up, Why should not you make up this quarrel?"

"Because he cursed me," said Sam.

"An idle word, spoken in wrath! Don't you know your father well enough to take that for what it is worth? What was it about?"

"It was about Carry, then."

"What had you said?"

"I said as how she ought to be let come home again, and that if I was to stay there at the mill, I'd fetch her. Then he struck at me with one of the mill-bolts. But I didn't think much o' that."

"Was it then he—cursed you?"

"No; mother came up, and I went aside with her. I told her as I'd go on speaking to the old man about Carry;—and so I did."

"And where is Carry?" Sam made no reply to this whatever. "You know where she can be found, Sam?" Sam shook his head, but didn't speak. "You couldn't have said that you would fetch her, if you didn't know where to find her."

"I wouldn't stop till I did find her, if the old man would take her back again. She's bad enough, no doubt, but there's others worse nor her."

"When did you see her last?"

"Over at Pycroft."

"And whither did she go from Pycroft, Sam?"

"She went to Lon'on, I suppose, Mr. Fenwick."

"And what is her address in London?" In reply to this Sam again shook his head. "Do you mean to seek her now?"

"What's the use of seeking her if I ain't got nowhere to put her into. Father's got a house and plenty of room in it. Where could I put her?"

"Sam, if you'll find her, and bring her to any place for me to see her, I'll find a home for her somewhere. I will, indeed. Or, if I knew where she was I'd go up to London to her myself. She's not my sister——!"

"No, sir, she ain't. The likes of you won't likely have a sister the likes of her. She's a——"

"Sam, stop. Don't say a bitter word of her. You love her."

"Yes;—I do. That don't make her not a bad 'un."

"So do I love her. And as for being bad, which of us isn't bad? The world is very hard on her offence."

"Down on it, like a dog on a rat."

"It is not for me to make light of her sin;—but her sin can be washed away as well as other sin. I love her too. She was the brightest, kindest, sauciest little lass in all the parish, when I came here."

"Father was proud enough of her then, Mr. Fenwick."

"You find her and let me know where she is, and I will make out a home for her somewhere;—that is, if she will be tractable. I'm afraid your father won't take her at the mill."

"He'll never set eyes on her again, if he can help

it. As for you, Mr. Fenwick, if there was only a few more like you about, the world wouldn't be so bad to get on in. Good-bye, Mr. Fenwick."

"Good-bye, Sam;—if it must be so."

"And don't you be afeared about me, Mr. Fenwick. If the hue-and-cry is out anyways again me, I'll turn up. That I will,—though it was to be hung afterwards, —sooner than you'd be hurt by anything I'd been a-doing."

So they parted, as friends rather than as enemies, though the Vicar knew very well that the young man was wrong to go and leave his father and mother, and that in all probability he would fall at once into some bad mode of living. But the conversation about Carry Brattle had so softened their hearts to each other, that Mr. Fenwick found it impossible to be severe. And he knew, moreover, that no severity of expression would have been of avail. He couldn't have stopped Sam from going had he preached to him for an hour.

After that the building of the chapel went on apace, the large tradesman from Salisbury being quicker in his work than could have been the small tradesman belonging to Bullhampton. In February there came a hard frost, and still the bricklayers were at work. It was said in Bullhampton that walls built as those walls were being built could never stand. But then it might be that these reports were spread by Mr. Grimes, that the fanatical ardour of the Salisbury Baptist lent something to the rapidity of his operations, and that the Bullhampton feeling in favour of Mr. Fenwick and the Church Establishment added something to the bitterness of the prevailing criticisms. At any rate, the walls of the new chapel were mounting higher and higher all through February, and by the end of the

first week in March there stood immediately opposite to the Vicarage gate a hideously ugly building, roofless, doorless, windowless;—with those horrid words, —“New Salem, 186—” legibly inscribed on a visible stone inserted above the doorway, a thing altogether as objectionable to the eyes of a Church of England parish clergyman as the imagination of any friend or enemy could devise. We all know the abominable adjuncts of a new building,—the squalid, half-used heaps of bad mortar, the eradicated grass, the truculent mud, the scattered brickbats, the remnants of timber, the débris of the workmen’s dinners, the morsels of paper scattered through the dirt! There had from time to time been actual encroachments on the Vicarage grounds, and Mrs. Fenwick, having discovered that the paint had been injured on the Vicarage gate, had sent an angry message to the Salisbury Baptist. The Salisbury Baptist had apologised to Mr. Fenwick, saying that such things would happen in the building of houses, etc., and Mr. Fenwick had assured him that the matter was of no consequence. He was not going to descend into the arena with the Salisbury Baptist. In this affair the Marquis of Trowbridge was his enemy, and with the Marquis he would fight, if there was to be any fight at all. He would stand at his gate and watch the work, and speak good-naturedly to the workmen; but he was in truth sick at heart. The thing, horrible as it was to him, so fascinated him that he could not keep his mind from it. During all this time it made his wife miserable. She had literally grown thin under the infliction of the new chapel. For more than a fortnight she had refused to visit the front gate of her own house. To and from church she always went by the garden wicket; but in

going to the school, she had to make a long round to avoid the chapel,—and this round she made day after day. Fenwick himself, still hoping that there might be some power of fighting, had written to an enthusiastic archdeacon, a friend of his, who lived not very far distant. The Archdeacon had consulted the Bishop, —really troubled deeply about the matter,—and the Bishop had taken upon himself, with his own hands, to write words of mild remonstrance to the Marquis. “For the welfare of the parish generally,” said the Bishop, “I venture to make this suggestion to your lordship, feeling sure that you will do anything that may not be unreasonable to promote the comfort of the parishioners.” In this letter he made no allusion to his late correspondence with the Marquis as to the sins of the Vicar. Nor did the Marquis in his reply allude to the former correspondence. He expressed an opinion that the erection of a place of Christian worship on an open space outside the bounds of a clergyman’s domain ought not to be held to be objectionable by that clergyman;—and that as he had already given the spot, he could not retract the gift. These letters, however, had been written before the first brick had been laid, and the world in that part of the country was of opinion that the Marquis might have retracted his gift. After this Mr. Fenwick found no ground whatever on which he could fight his battle. He could only stand at his gateway, and look at the thing as it rose above the ground, fascinated by its ugliness.

He was standing there once, about a month or five weeks after his interview with Sam Brattle, just at the beginning of March, when he was accosted by the Squire. Mr. Gilmore, through the winter,—ever since

he had heard that Mary Lowther's engagement with Walter Marrable had been broken off,—had lived very much alone. He had been pressed to come to the Vicarage, but had come but seldom, waiting patiently till the time should come when he might again ask Mary to be his wife. He was not so gloomy as he had been during the time the engagement had lasted, but still he was a man much altered from his former self. Now he came across the road, and spoke a word or two to his friend. "If I were you, Frank, I should not think so much about it."

"Yes, you would, old boy, if it touched you as it does me. It isn't that the chapel should be there. I could have built a chapel for them with my own hands on the same spot, if it had been necessary."

"I don't see what there is to annoy you."

"This annoys me,—that after all my endeavours, there should be people here, and many people, who find a gratification in doing that which they think I shall look upon as an annoyance. The sting is in their desire to sting, and in my inability to show them their error, either by stopping what they are doing, or by proving myself indifferent to it. It isn't the building itself, but the double disgrace of the building."

CHAPTER XXXVII

FEMALE MARTYRDOM

EARLY in February Captain Marrable went to Dunriple to stay with his uncle, Sir Gregory, and there he still was when the middle of March had come. News of his doings reached the ladies at Loring, but it reached them through hands which were not held to be worthy of perfect belief,—at any rate, on Mary Lowther's part. Dunriple Park is in Warwickshire, and lies in the middle of a good hunting country. Now, according to Parson John, from whom these tidings came, Walter Marrable was hunting three days a week; and, as Sir Gregory himself did not keep hunters, Walter must have hired his horses—so said Parson John, deploring that a nephew so poor in purse should have allowed himself to be led into such heavy expense. "He brought home a little ready money with him," said the parson; "and I suppose he thinks he may have his fling as long as that lasts." No doubt Parson John, in saying this, was desirous of proving to Mary that Walter Marrable was not dying of love, and was, upon the whole, leading a jolly life, in spite of the little misfortune that had happened to him. But Mary understood all this quite as well as did Parson John himself; and simply declined to believe the hunting three days a week. She said not a word about it, however, either to him or to her aunt. If Walter could amuse himself, so much the better; but she was quite sure that, at such a period of his life as this, he would not spend his money recklessly. The truth lay between

Parson John's stories and poor Mary's belief. Walter Marrable was hunting,—perhaps twice a week, hiring a horse occasionally, but generally mounted by his uncle, Sir Gregory. He hunted; but did so after a lugubrious fashion, as became a man with a broken heart, who was laden with many sorrows, and had just been separated from his lady love for ever and ever. But still, when there came anything good, in the way of a run, and when our Captain could get near to hounds, he enjoyed the fun, and forgot his troubles for a while. Is a man to know no joy because he has an ache at his heart?

In this matter of disappointed and, as it were, disjointed affection, men are very different from women, and for the most part, much more happily circumstanced. Such sorrow a woman feeds;—but a man starves it. Many will say that a woman feeds it, because she cannot but feed it; and that a man starves it, because his heart is of the starving kind. But, in truth, the difference comes not so much from the inner heart, as from the outer life. It is easier to feed a sorrow upon needle-and-thread and novels, than it is upon lawyers' papers, or even the out-a-door occupations of a soldier home upon leave who has no work to do. Walter Marrable told himself again and again that he was very unhappy about his cousin, but he certainly did not suffer in that matter as Mary suffered. He had that other sorrow, arising from his father's cruel usage of him, to divide his thoughts, and probably thought quite as much of the manner in which he had been robbed, as he did the loss of his love.

But poor Mary was, in truth, very wretched. When a girl asks herself that question,—what shall she do with her life? it is so natural that she should answer it

by saying that she will get married, and give her life to somebody else. It is a woman's one career—let women rebel against the edict as they may; and though there may be word-rebellion here and there, women learn the truth early in their lives. And women know it later in life when they think of their girls; and men know it, too, when they have to deal with their daughters. Girls, too, now acknowledge aloud that they have learned the lesson; and Saturday Reviewers and others blame them for their lack of modesty in doing so,—most unreasonably, most uselessly, and, as far as the influence of such censors may go, most perniciously. Nature prompts the desire, the world acknowledges its ubiquity, circumstances show that it is reasonable, the whole theory of creation requires it; but it is required that the person most concerned should falsely repudiate it, in order that a mock modesty may be maintained, in which no human being can believe! Such is the theory of the censors who deal heavily with our Englishwomen of the present day. Our daughters should be educated to be wives, but, forsooth, they should never wish to be wooed! The very idea is but a remnant of the tawdry sentimentality of an age in which the mawkish insipidity of the women was the reaction from the vice of that preceding it. That our girls are in quest of husbands, and know well in what way their lines in life should be laid, is a fact which none can dispute. Let men be taught to recognise the same truth as regards themselves, and we shall cease to hear of the necessity of a new career for women.

Mary Lowther, though she had never encountered condemnation as a husband-hunter, had learned all this, and was well aware that for her there was but one future mode of life that could be easily blessed.

She had eyes, and could see; and ears, and could hear. She could make,—indeed, she could not fail to make,—comparisons between her aunt and her dear friend, Mrs. Fenwick. She saw, and could not fail to see, that the life of the one was a starved, thin, poor life,—which, good as it was in its nature, reached but to few persons, and admitted but of few sympathies; whereas the other woman, by means of her position as a wife and a mother, increased her roots and spread out her branches, so that there was shade, and fruit, and beauty, and a place in which the birds might build their nests. Mary Lowther had longed to be a wife,—as do all girls healthy in mind and body; but she had found it to be necessary to her to love the man who was to become her husband. There had come to her a suitor recommended to her by all her friends,—recommended to her also by all outward circumstances,—and she had found that she did not love him? For a while she had been sorely perplexed, hardly knowing what it might be her duty to do, not understanding how it was that the man was indifferent to her, doubting whether, after all, the love of which she had dreamt was not a passion which might come after marriage, rather than before it,—but still fearing to run so great a hazard. She had doubted, feared, and had hitherto declined,—when that other lover had fallen in her way. Mr. Gilmore had wooed her for months without touching her heart. Then Walter Marrable had come and had conquered her almost in an hour. She had never felt herself disposed to play with Mr. Gilmore's hair, to lean against his shoulder, to be touched by his fingers,—never disposed to wait for his coming, or to regret his going. But she had hardly become acquainted with her cousin before his presence was a pleasure to her; and no sooner had he

spoken to her of his love, than everything that concerned him was dear to her. The atmosphere that surrounded him was sweeter to her than the air elsewhere. All those little aids which a man gives to a woman were delightful to her when they came to her from his hands. She told herself that she had found the second half that was needed to make herself one whole; that she had become round and entire in joining herself to him; and she thought that she understood well why it had been that Mr. Gilmore had been nothing to her. As Mr. Fenwick was manifestly the husband appointed for his wife, so had Walter Marable been appointed for her. And so there had come upon her a dreamy conviction that marriages are made in heaven. That question, whether they were to be poor or rich, to have enough or much less than enough for the comforts of life, was, no doubt, one of much importance; but, in the few happy days of her assured engagement, it was not allowed by her to interfere for a moment with the fact that she and Walter were intended, each to be the companion of the other, as long as they two might live.

Then by degrees,—by degrees, though the process had been quick,—had fallen upon her that other conviction, that it was her duty to him to save him from the burdens of that life to which she herself had looked forward so fondly. At first she had said that he should judge of the necessity; swearing to herself that his judgment, let it be what it might, should be right to her. Then she had perceived that this was not sufficient;—that in this way there would be no escape for him;—that she herself must make the decision, and proclaim it. Very tenderly and very cautiously had she gone about her task; feeling her way to the fact that this

separation, if it came from her, would be deemed expedient by him. That she would be right in all this, was her great resolve; that she might after all be wrong, her constant fear. She, too, had heard of public censors, of the girl of the period, and of the forward indelicacy with which women of the age were charged. She knew not why, but it seemed to her that the laws of the world around her demanded more of such rectitude from a woman than from a man, and, if it might be possible to her, she would comply with these laws. She had convinced herself, forming her judgment from every tone of his voice, from every glance of his eye, from every word that fell from his lips, that this separation would be expedient for him. And then, assuring herself that the task should be hers, and not his, she had done it. She had done it, and, counting up the cost afterwards, she had found herself to be broken in pieces. That wholeness and roundness, in which she had rejoiced, had gone from her altogether. She would try to persuade herself that she could live as her aunt had lived, and yet be whole and round. She tried, but knew that she failed. The life to which she had looked forward had been the life of a married woman; and now, as that was taken from her, she could be but a thing broken, a fragment of humanity, created for use, but never to be used.

She bore all this well, for a while,—and indeed never ceased to bear it well, to the eyes of those around her. When Parson John told her of Walter's hunting, she laughed, and said that she hoped he would distinguish himself. When her aunt on one occasion congratulated her, telling her that she had done well and nobly, she bore the congratulation with a smile and a kind word. But she thought about it much, and within the cham-

bers of her own bosom there were complaints made that the play which had been played between him and her during the last few months should for her have been such a very tragedy, while for him the matter was no more than a melodrama, touched with a pleasing melancholy. He had not been made a waif upon the waters by the misfortune of a few weeks, by the error of a lawyer, by a mistaken calculation,—not even by the crime of his father. His manhood was, at any rate, perfect to him. Though he might be a poor man, he was still a man with his hands free, and with something before him which he could do. She understood, too, that the rough work of his life would be such that it would rub away, perhaps too quickly, the impression of his late love, and enable him hereafter to love another. But for her,—for her there could be nothing but memory, regrets, and a life which would simply be a waiting for death. But she had done nothing wrong,—and she must console herself with that, if consolation could then be found.

Then there came to her a letter from Mrs. Fenwick which moved her much. It was the second which she had received from her friend since she had made it known that she was no longer engaged to her cousin. In her former letter Mrs. Fenwick had simply expressed her opinion that Mary had done rightly, and had, at the same time, promised that she would write again, more at length, when the passing by of a few weeks should have so far healed the first agony of the wound, as to make it possible for her to speak of the future. Mary, dreading this second letter, had done nothing to elicit it; but at last it came. And as it had some effect on Mary Lowther's future conduct, it shall be given to the reader:—

“Bullhampton Vicarage, March 12, 186—.

“DEAREST MARY,

“I do so wish you were here, if it were only to share our misery with us. I did not think that so small a thing as the building of a wretched chapel could have put me out so much, and made me so uncomfortable as this has done. Frank says that it is simply the feeling of being beaten,—the insult not the injury, which is the grievance; but they both rankle with me. I hear the click of the trowel every hour, and though I never go near the front gate, yet I know that it is all muddy and foul with brickbats and mortar. I don't think that anything so cruel and unjust was ever done before; and the worst of it is that Frank, though he hates it just as much as I do, does preach such sermons to me about the wickedness of caring for small evils. ‘Suppose you had to go to it every Sunday yourself,’ he said the other day, trying to make me understand what a real depth of misery there is in the world. ‘I shouldn't mind that half so much,’ I answered. Then he bade me try it,—which wasn't fair because he knows I can't. However, they say it will all tumble down because it has been built so badly.

“I have been waiting to hear from you, but I can understand why you should not write. You do not wish to speak of your cousin, or to write without speaking of him. Your aunt has written to me twice, as doubtless you know, and has told me that you are well, only more silent than heretofore. Dearest Mary, do write to me, and tell me what is in your heart. I will not ask you to come to us,—not yet,—because of our neighbour; but I do think that if you were here I could do you good. I know so well, or fancy that I know so well, the current in which your thoughts are run-

ning! You have had a wound, and think that therefore you must be a cripple for life. But it is not so; and such thoughts, if not wicked, are at least wrong. I would that it had been otherwise. I would that you had not met your cousin."—"So would not I," said Mary to herself; but as she said it she knew that she was wrong. Of course it would be for her welfare and for his' too, if his heart was as hers, that she should never have seen him.—"But because you have met him, and have fancied that you and he would be all in all together, you will be wrong indeed if you let that fancy ruin your future life. Or if you encourage yourself to feel that, because you have loved one man from whom you are necessarily parted, therefore you should never allow yourself to become attached to another, you will indeed be teaching yourself an evil lesson. I think I can understand the arguments with which you may perhaps endeavour to persuade your heart that its work of loving has been done, and should not be renewed; but I am quite sure that they are false and inhuman. The Indian, indeed, allows herself to be burned through a false idea of personal devotion; and if that idea be false in a widow, how much falser is it in one who has never been a wife.

"You know what have ever been our wishes. They are the same now as heretofore; and his constancy is of that nature, that nothing will ever change it. I am persuaded that it would have been unchanged, even if you had married your cousin, though in that case he would have been studious to keep out of your way. I do not mean to press his claims at present. I have told him that he should be patient, and that if the thing be to him as important as he makes it, he should be content to wait. He replied that he would wait. I

ask for no word from you at present on this subject. It will be much better that there should be no word. But it is right that you should know that there is one who loves you with a devotion which nothing can alter.

"I will only add to this my urgent prayer that you will not make too much to yourself of your own misfortune, or allow yourself to think that because this and that have taken place, therefore everything must be over. It is hard to say who makes the greatest mistakes, women who treat their own selves with too great a reverence, or they who do so with too little.

"Frank sends his kindest love. Write to me at once, if only to condole with me about the chapel.

"Most affectionately yours,

"JANET FENWICK.

"My sister and Mr. Quickenham are coming here for Easter week, and I have still some hopes of getting my brother-in-law to put us up to some way of fighting the Marquis and his myrmidons. I have always heard it said that there was no case in which Mr. Quickenham couldn't make a fight."

Mary Lowther understood well the whole purport of this letter,—all that was meant as well as all that was written. She had told herself again and again that there had been that between her and the lover she had lost,—tender embraces, warm kisses, a bird-like pressure of the plumage,—which alone should make her deem it unfit that she should be to another man as she had been to him, even should her heart allow it. It was against this doctrine that her friend had preached, with more or less of explicitness in her sermon. And how was the truth? If she could take a lesson on that subject from any human being in the world, she would

take it from her friend Janet Fenwick. But she rebelled against the preaching, and declared to herself that her friend had never been tried, and therefore did not understand the case. Must she not be guided by her own feelings, and did she not feel that she could never lay her head on the shoulder of another lover without blushing at her memories of the past?

And yet how hard was it all? It was not the joys of young love that she regretted in her present mood, not the loss of those soft delights of which she had suddenly found herself to be so capable; but that all the world should be dark and dreary before her! And he could hunt, could dance, could work,—no doubt could love again! How happy it would be for her if her reason would allow her to be a Roman Catholic, and a nun!

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